

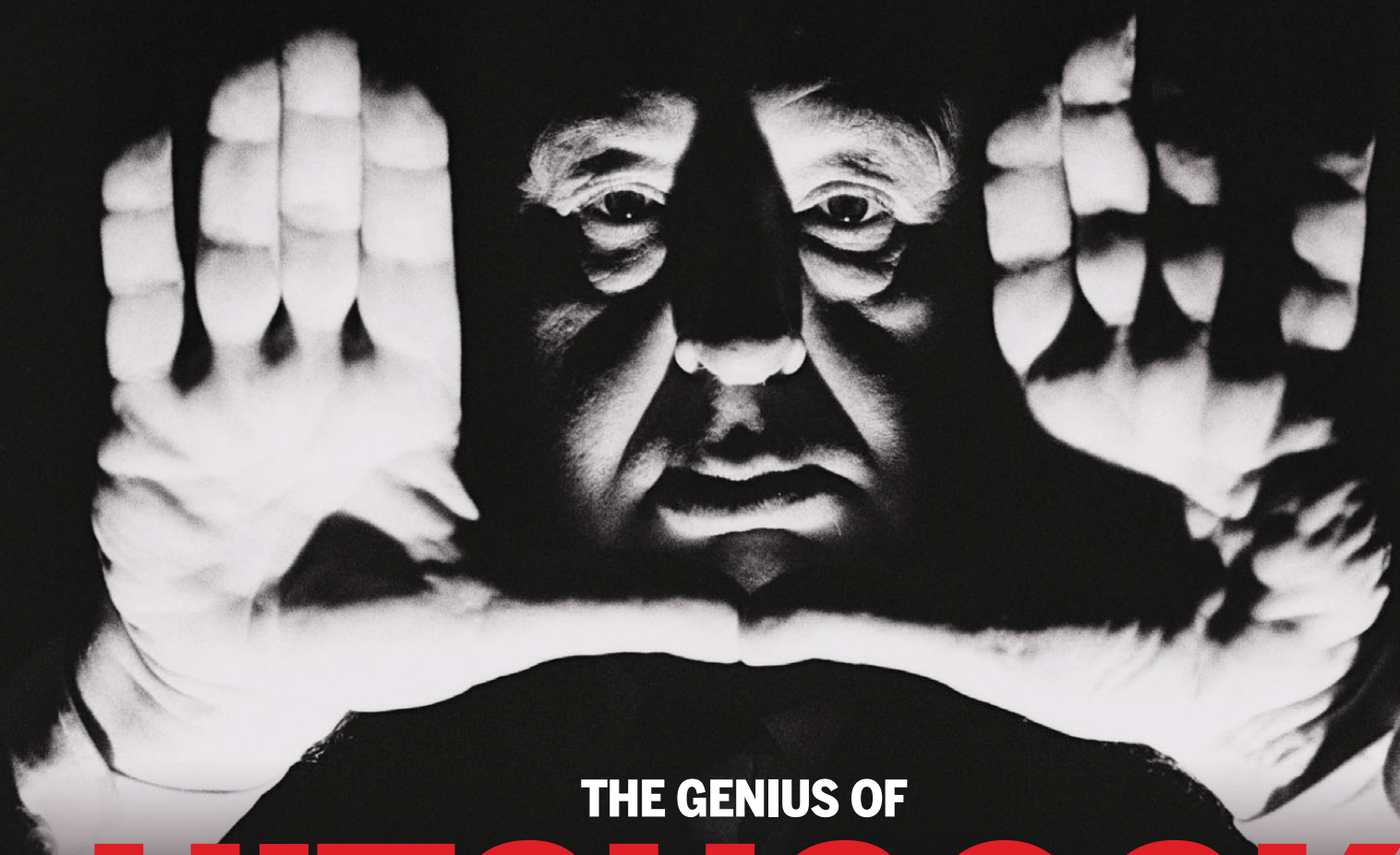
# Sight & Sound

THE INTERNATIONAL FILM MAGAZINE



August 12

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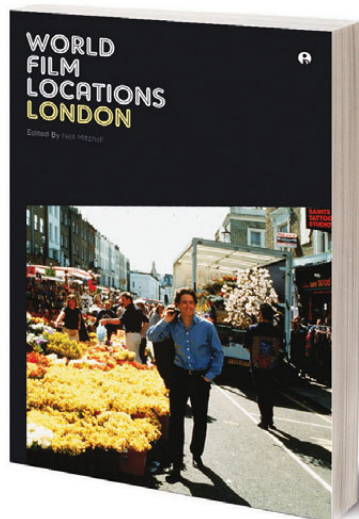
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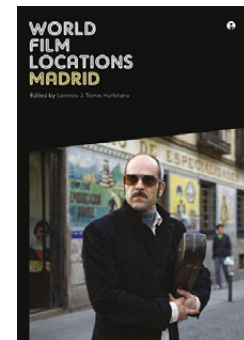
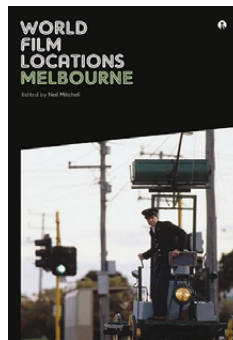
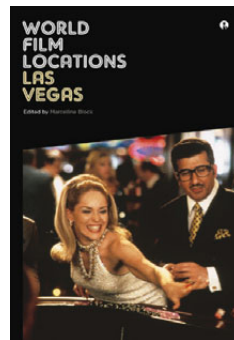
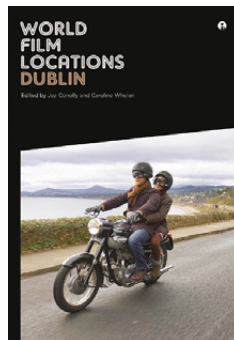
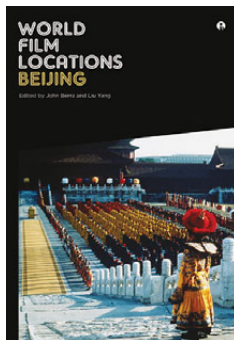
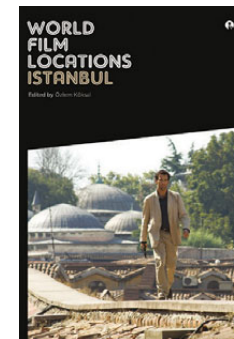
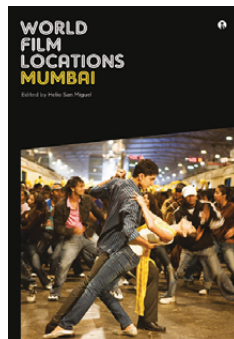
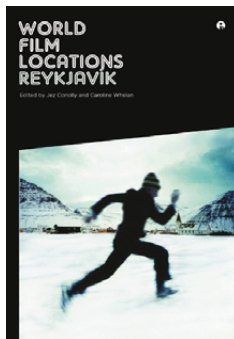
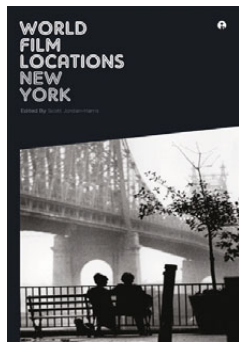
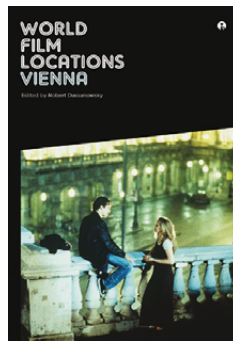
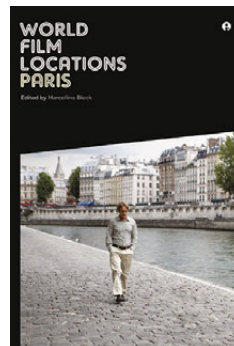
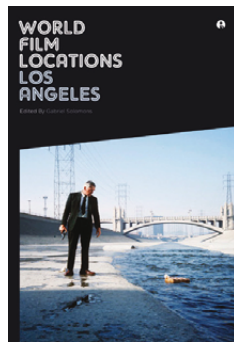
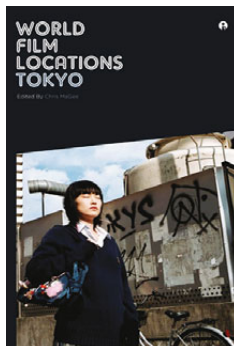


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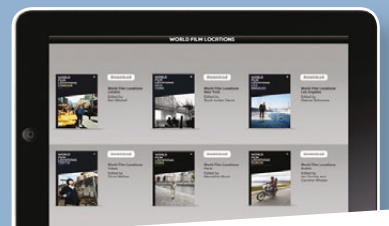
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## COVER

Alfred Hitchcock in 1964.

© Tony Evans/Timelapse Library Ltd/Getty Images

Next issue  
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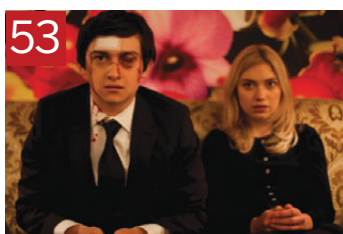




GETTY IMAGES (3)

**Welcome.** Appropriately enough in this Olympic month, when the eyes of the world are turned on London, two London-born filmmakers dominate this issue: Alfred Hitchcock (left and p.38) and Christopher Nolan (far left and p.14), who like Hitch has succeeded in the rare feat of conquering Hollywood while remaining faithful to his distinctive creative vision. While those two left our shores in search of filmmaking opportunities, the great DP Wolfgang Suschitzky (p.22), who turns 100 this month, came here from Austria, and proceeded to work on everything from *Get Carter* to *Worzel Gummidge*. But as far as we know he never worked with Bruce Lacey (p.26), the uniquely English eccentric whose work continues to inspire artist Jeremy Deller (p.29). If that's all sounding a bit too British, we've thrown in a Soviet silent comedy (p.30) and a Chilean meditation on space and history (p.34). **♥ Nick James**

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**AND ONLINE THIS MONTH** Extended interviews with Patricio Guzmán, Andrew Kötting and Iain Sinclair | Edinburgh | build-up to our 'Greatest Films of All Time' poll [www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound)

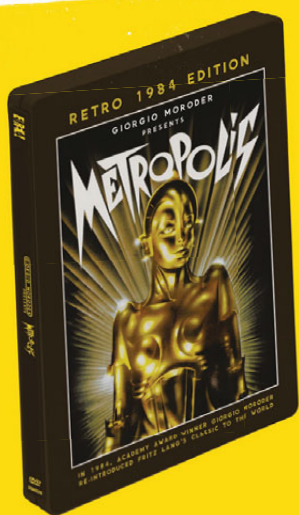
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# NICK JAMES UNFLASHY TANGO



Four years ago, in this column, I wrote about the Edinburgh International Film Festival just after it had moved its dates from August – when it coincided with the wider Edinburgh Festival of theatre, music and other performance arts – to June, when it could

stand alone and exploit the pleasures of its host city without so much competition. My themes were how this change (or rather wrench) made a welcoming festival more amenable because it had room to breathe, that it could do with more help and patience from critics to make the transition work, and that the less amenable Cineworld complex (where a large chunk of the screenings take place) lacked the atmosphere a film festival needs. If I say now that none of that has changed, it might sound as if the EIFF is a hamster on a wheel. But in the context of what happened last year, to be back with its original set of challenges amounts to a recovery.

Put briefly (and diplomatically), last year an invidious mixture of creative differences and corporate ignorance fractured relationships between those who care about and/or have a stake in the festival. As a result, the programme was wrecked by changes and confusions in intention and leadership during the run-up to the festival. If I'm being euphemistic here, it's partly because – like so many who got wind of the impending catastrophe – I didn't go, and partly because the debacle was widely reported at the time, and I want to focus here on the festival's current prospects.

But how do you recover from such a collapse? In the case of new Artistic Director Chris Fujiwara (a *Sight & Sound* contributor), the answer is: by calmly and courteously putting together a wide-ranging programme of intriguing and curious titles – intriguing in the sense that so many of them were off *S&S*'s radar. My own sampling of that programme was dictated somewhat by a role Fujiwara asked me to fill some months back – that of mentoring (along with Dutch critic Dana Linssen and US programmer Gabe Klinger) a new jury of student critics.

The selection made for them cut across the festival's different strands. I can't say that it was more than an average run of films (some bad, some interesting, some good), but it did include one of my films of the year so far – Miguel Gomes's *Tabu*. I'm glad to say, however, that the student jury didn't take my hint, opting instead to give their award to the fine Korean 'scenes from a marriage'-type drama *Sleepless Night*. Other titles outside their selection helped create a buzz at the festival's two key meeting-places, the Filmhouse and the Traverse Theatre bar. To the

always winningly breezy EIFF team, this must all feel like balm on the wound left by last year. For the record, I enjoyed *One.2.One*, *Papirosen*, *What Is This Film Called Love?*, *The Unspeakable Act* and *Here, Then* – and wished I'd had more time for the Filipino films and the retrospectives.

Fujiwara's main assets are his passion for and persuasive understanding of the multifarious artform that is cinema – which may be why such sought-after titles as *Tabu* and Peter Strickland's *Berberian Sound Studio* found their way to Edinburgh, when they might have gone elsewhere. Fujiwara is backed by a chief executive, Ken Hay, who gets the culture of film festivals, has a good sense of humour and believes in the creative direction. It's obvious that Edinburgh's resources are modest and that box-office takings may not be strong this time because of the backwash from last year, but the patient has pink cheeks and is back on its feet, dancing a steady, unflashy tango.

**It's obvious that Edinburgh's resources are modest, but the patient has pink cheeks and is back on its feet, dancing a steady, unflashy tango**

## Changing up

This edition of *Sight & Sound* marks the last outing of a format that, though it has served us well, is now in need of refreshment and greater ambition. From next issue the magazine will look different, carry more pages and have new sections designed to widen our overview of film and the moving image into less-explored areas. You can look forward to a fresher and cleaner graphic approach, new columns by terrific writers – some established, some new – and changes in the way some familiar sections are presented. But most of all, what we're aiming for is a magazine that reflects the voracious and ever-growing appetite our readers have for all things touched by the art of the cinema. I'm not going into more detail here because I don't want to spoil the surprise. All I can say is: watch this space!

As well as appearing in a print edition, our next issue will also be the first that you can also read cover to cover on your home computer or tablet device. The *Sight & Sound* digital edition will contain video content and links to online resources which, we hope, will make for an enriched reading experience. Even more exciting, however will be the unveiling of the complete digital archive of *S&S* and the *Monthly Film Bulletin*. Available to subscribers only, this 80-year archive of unparalleled film commentary and criticism is a must for anyone truly interested in the histories of cinema, both forgotten and remembered.



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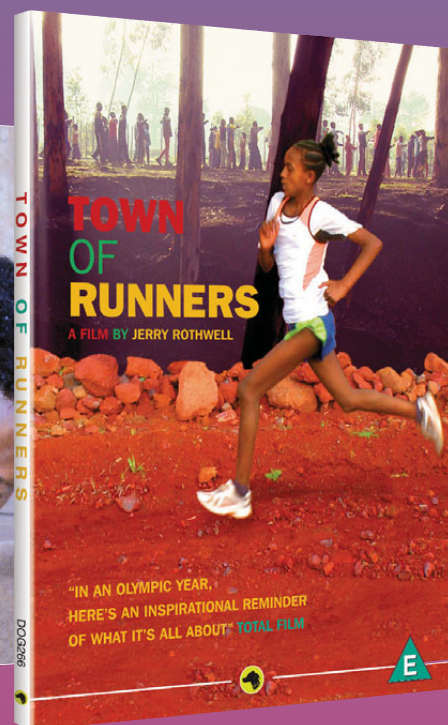
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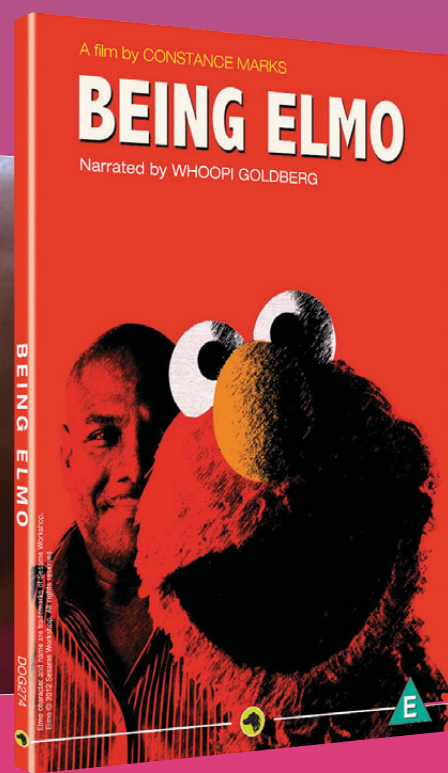
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## THE BIGGER PICTURE



## Picture perfect

As Joel W. Finler writes in the new edition of 'Hollywood Movie Stills', his bountifully illustrated history of stills photography during the glory days of the studio system, the still photograph – be it a studio portrait of a star, an on-set snapshot, a production still or an 'at home with the stars' assignment – was a crucial part of the industry. For historians today, stills are one of the most vital sources of information on a film's production and reception – and in some cases, where the

original film has been lost, they're our only visual record. And yet, Finler argues, the role of the photographers themselves has gone largely unreported. In addition to reproductions of images of the stars – such as Joan Crawford (above) and Humphrey Bogart (right) – Finler examines the photographers themselves, whether celebrated (Cecil Beaton, Cornel Lucas) or obscure to most (Robert Coburn, John Engstead, Laszlo Willinger and more). The book is out now, published by Titan Books.





# Andrew Sarris (1928-2012)

**David Thomson** pays tribute to the critic who pioneered the auteur theory in the US

Andrew Sarris wrote the way you might have expected of Herbert Marshall in Lubitsch's *Trouble in Paradise*, if that character had been led astray from jewel theft and flirtation by such far-fetched hobbies as an auteur theory. Just enjoy this for a moment: it's his 'Letter from New York' in *Movie*, no. 15, 1965:

"I had a fleeting thought about all this nostalgia for the good old days of the Second World War, lately reflected in movies like *Operation Crossbow* and *Von Ryan's Express*. What interests me is the way the plots operate on a comic strip level of physical and psychological probability, and yet the good guys (and gals) get killed in the end without too much fuss. Part of this is simply anti-cliché since we all remember how the good guys used to stay alive to make the Democracy and Brotherhood speech back in the days when we were actually fighting the Jerries and the Japs. However, I think there is also a growing feeling that the ones who died back then had all the best of it. They died in the warm glow of an idealistic conviction about the Post-War World, a world that, to say the least, has hardly lived up to expectations. A great many beautiful people died back in that War, and we now mourn them, the beautiful and the doomed, the way people back in the Forties used to mourn the beautiful and the damned of the Twenties, those fortunate F. Scott Fitzgerald characters who fell apart before the crash ended their era and disgraced their folly."

Yes, that was 1965, when so many things were just happening, like Godard, *Movie* and a resurgence in American film signalled by *Psycho*, *The Manchurian Candidate*, *Mickey One* and *Lilith*, but hardly delivered yet. He was 37 already, and the best film critic in America – at *The Village Voice*, where for five years he had been drip-feeding into the American bloodstream the idea of directors as the responsible (and irresponsible) figures.

He had begun seeing movies, in Queens, in about 1931 – in time for *Trouble in Paradise*. One of two sons of parents born in Greece, he was a smart boy who graduated from Columbia College in 1951. Then he was three years in the Army Signal Corps before he went back to Queens to live with his widowed mother. His brother would be killed



Critical mass: Andrew Sarris with his wife Molly Haskell in 1989

in an accident in 1960. So Sarris the young man was a figure from a film of the 1930s where the hero does his duty without complaint, and then sees the light – the *lumière*. He took a year in Paris in the late 50s, and he always had Paris and its ferment of ideas at that moment.

He found the writers who would become the New Wave, he saw all the movies Paris had then, and he realised that directors were key. So he came back to New York and let a new culture grow up around him: the *politique des auteurs*, *The Village Voice*, teaching at Columbia and meeting Molly Haskell. She was his junior for a while, but an elegant, witty knockout from Virginia, the sort of woman who would have distracted Lubitsch. They were married, and they were each other's finest work. In time everyone would gossip about the bickering rivalry between Andy and Pauline Kael, and that existed for

sure and fertilised the new movie culture. But Andy-and-Molly was the big thing – which is not to say they didn't have their own arguments, like Walter Burns and Hildy Johnson in *His Girl Friday*, with no quarter asked or offered.



His kind of movie: 'Madame de...'

The furore with Kael was good for us all: every Laurel needs a Hardy. Film criticism thrived on their battles. Andy was himself combative, cutting and Greek then, but Pauline was the truer fighter. She needed the battle; he suffered it. It was in their nature that by 1968 Pauline was at *The New Yorker*, issuing her electric fiats, while Andy published a book, *The American Cinema: Directors and Directions 1929-1968*, the work of a scholar as much as a critic, economical but profound, and one of the books that film students knew nearly by heart. (Its companion volume is Molly's *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies*, published in 1974.) *The American Cinema* tried to rank filmmakers at a time when the new audience needed to appreciate directors and track down all their works. It had invaluable lists of the films they had made, along with incisive commentary.

Kael never taught, but she ranged around, looking for fights and disciples, and hoping that the urgency of the new American cinema would last. She even tried Hollywood. Andy kept to New York. I entertained him and Molly once in California in the 1980s, and I think he had hardly seen the West before. It was in the mid-80s, on a driving tour in Europe after the Cannes festival, that Andy contracted a mysterious virus. By the summer in New York, he was close to dying – it is a story told by Molly in her memoir *Love and Other Infectious Diseases*. He pulled through, but he was never quite the same source of energy again and his wonderful baritone drawl – which could slide with irony and warmth into a high tenor – became creakier.

He moved to *The New York Observer*, and he continued to teach. In 1998 he published "*You Ain't Heard Nothin' Yet*": *The American Talking Film, History and Memory 1927-1949*; more recently, he wrote an occasional column for *Film Comment*. If he declined further in the last few years, it was to make room for a new gentleness.

He was catholic in his tastes, but 1927-1949 and smart talking pictures were his favourite territory. He loved Lubitsch, Sturges, von Sternberg, Preminger, and he delighted in the players of that period. He was the first person who wrote about Margaret Sullavan, Myrna Loy and William Powell as treasures. His favourite film, I think, was *Madame de...* by Max Ophüls. With his passing, we lose not just his voice and his example. History itself is gone. But he felt that possibility as long ago as 1965.



# Stranger in a strange land

**Nick Bradshaw** on how apartheid fostered the legend of a lost 1970s rock prophet

"The perfect story is one you can retell in three minutes, and every sentence is interesting," advises Malik Bendjelloul. "When I told people the skeleton of this story, it was like 'Wow!' and then 'wow!' and then 'wow!'... I'd never heard a story that provoked so much energy when I told it."

Bendjelloul's story, expertly unfolded in his feature-documentary debut *Searching for Sugar Man*, is one of faraway times and disparate cities, of missed chances, unlikely cross-cultural pollination and the stirring satisfactions of belated recognition. It's also one whose pleasures of revelation are hard not to spoil (you can read a fuller synopsis on page 70), but it starts like this: despite the attentions of producing legends Mike Theodore and Steve Rowland, the two albums recorded by enigmatic inner-Detroit folk-rockers Sixto Rodriguez in 1970 and 1971 (*Cold Fact* and *Coming from Reality*) confounded all expectations by sinking without trace, and in a weird realisation of the lyrics of his last recorded song, his label laid him off two weeks before Christmas.



International man of mystery: Sixto Rodriguez

Somehow, though, the records washed up in apartheid-era South Africa, where their fresh and frank protest lyrics struck a chord with a young liberal generation suffocating under the repressively conservative regime; we're told *Cold Fact* even introduced the word 'anti-establishment' to the country. Slowly *Cold Fact* became, to South Africans, "one of the most famous records of all time", "bigger than Elvis"... "oh, much bigger than the Rolling Stones." Still,

it wasn't until the mid 90s that anyone there seriously investigated the artist's curiously divergent record-cover credits, or the conflicting myths of his post-recording denouement ("It wasn't just a suicide – it was one of the most grotesque suicides in rock history"), or the money trail of this covert platinum-seller...

Why had no South African director already told the story? "In a way I think it was too famous," says Bendjelloul. "It needed someone from

the outside who could experience it like new." I tell him I'm reminded of *Buena Vista Social Club* – another petri-dish story of culture developing in isolation. "Correct, and this case was very extreme," says Bendjelloul, counting off three factors: one, a country censored from the inside and boycotted from without; two, the isolation of Rodriguez himself, who for long periods could only be contacted through the telephone at his local bar; and three, the wideness of the world before the internet. "And all these things were resolved after apartheid fell in 1994, and the internet came at the same time."

And the mystery man himself, who as a construction worker apparently used to turn up to work in a tuxedo? "Rodriguez tells us something about this world," says Bendjelloul. "Every day can be a special day; construction work can be the most important work there is if you look at it that way. It's just a way of perceiving things and believing what you do with your life has an importance. Rodriguez proves that: he changed the world without even knowing it, and created art that maybe will be around forever."

■ *'Searching for Sugar Man' is released on 27 July*

## THE NUMBERS

# Market 'Share'

**Charles Gant** on how Ken Loach's *The Angels' Share* paid off north of the border

Ever since his big-screen breakthrough *Kes* (1969), there has been humour as well as gritty social realism in Ken Loach's work. But few expected him to make a film that could be successfully marketed as "Scotland's answer to *The Full Monty*". With *The Angels' Share* (which is incidentally one of the first features in which the new BFI Film Fund has been involved to be released in the UK), distributor Entertainment One has boldly positioned the title as a mainstream comedy north of the border, where it's more than held its own against Hollywood blockbuster opposition including *Men in Black 3* and *Snow White and the Huntsman*. The film has played in every Scottish multiplex and arthouse site, with negligible week-

on-week drops for the first month, and has so far generated 70 per cent of its total UK and Ireland box-office from the region.

The success comes as no surprise to Entertainment One boss Alex Hamilton, who'd already road-tested a twin-track approach with Peter Mullan's *Neds*, reaching arthouse fans south of the border and more mainstream audiences in Scotland. Thanks to ITV's roots as several separate companies, it's simple – and surprisingly cheap – to advertise to Scottish TV viewers; the distributor also bought large-format outdoor space, bus sides and sites in Glasgow underground. Loach's name didn't appear in TV spots for the whisky caper. "We positioned the film in an utterly mainstream manner," says Hamilton. "Our 'Enjoy responsibly' tagline and campaign image with the guys in kilts and the Irn-Bru bottles was a playful and knowing representation of Scottish

stereotypes. We wanted to be fun."

Releasing on Jubilee weekend put the film in a highly competitive environment for eyeballs, including blanket TV coverage of the anniversary festivities. But, says Hamilton, "I was conscious that there weren't going to be any street parties in Glasgow." The fact that Scotland had failed to qualify for Euro 2012 football was a bonus, especially since England and Ireland's participation had led to a dearth of strong titles arriving in June in the weeks after *The Angels' Share*'s release.

Helping the film's positioning as a mainstream film is its 15 certificate, won by careful negotiation and judicious audio tweaks after Britain's censor the BBFC initially labelled it 18 for excessive use of the c-word, normally limited to a maximum of five in a 15-certificate film. "We argued that in Glasgow and the way it's used in the film it doesn't carry the same level of offence, and can even be

## Films with regional skews at UK/Ireland box office

| Film                            | Gross       | Skew* |
|---------------------------------|-------------|-------|
| In Bruges                       | £4,898,165  | 56%   |
| The Guard                       | £4,591,148  | 77%   |
| The Wind that Shakes the Barley | £3,814,592  | 66%   |
| The Magdalene Sisters           | £2,140,234  | 35%   |
| Looking for Eric                | £1,311,924  | 17%   |
| The Angels' Share               | £1,230,630† | 70%   |
| 24 Hour Party People            | £1,012,280  | 24%   |
| Neds                            | £974,035    | 79%   |
| Sweet Sixteen                   | £821,967    | 55%   |
| Purely Belter                   | £774,997    | 31%   |

\*defined by % of total gross taken in home TV region  
†still on release

an endearment," says Hamilton. "We did say to Ken and producer Rebecca O'Brien, 'Don't feel you have to do anything, but we may get a 15 if we can reduce it.' In the end, there are seven instances. We did relish the opportunity to play everywhere and to 15-, 16-, 17-year-olds."

# Ride a white swan

Andrew Kötting's new film 'Swandown' is the result of a bizarre pedalo trip he took with the writer Iain Sinclair. Nick James joins them

On a June day of knockabout winds and partial sun, I arrive near the eastern entrance to the Regent's Canal tunnel that cuts beneath Islington. I can see Iain Sinclair on a bench, contemplating the filthy black water. I'm here to meet this tracer of 'morphic resonances' and author of such crucial London exegeses as *Lud Heat*, *Downriver*, *White Chappell*, *Scarlet Tracings*, *Lights Out for the Territory*, *London Orbital* and *Hackney*, *That Rose-Red Empire*. But that said, the project we're here to discuss, *Swandown*, is not principally Sinclair's, though he is its guiding spirit. The film has been made by the equally fecund artist/filmmaker Andrew Kötting, a geezerish manhandler of poetic pranks and pratfalls best known for his feature-length works *Gallivant* (1997), *This Filthy Earth* (2001) and *Ivul* (2009).

I've known, admired, been amused and bemused by both these figures for years, but I've never met them together. Sinclair writes for this magazine occasionally, and Kötting is someone I met socially 20 years ago, whose work I've followed ever since. The duo's idea for the project was to borrow a swan pedalo (dubbed Edith) from the amusement lake on the seafront at Hastings, take it onto the sea and round to the entrance to inland waterways so as to make a scimitar-like movement towards the London borough of Hackney, Sinclair's principal subject and the setting for a project he loathes – the London Olympics.

Kötting's job, while shooting the film, was to get that swan from Hastings to Hackney, via canals, the Medway and eventually the Thames; Sinclair made several visits to sit beside him and mythologise. The whole trip was planned in such a way that Kötting's camera crew could capture casual encounters with passing riverside people, and it's these that provide most of the film's stand-out moments. Sinclair is the explainer, the context-giver, the master of ceremonies, and Kötting the undercutter, the stunt artist, the man ever suspicious of pretension.

Here at the canalside, Kötting saunters down the ramp to meet us, looking dry, tanned and relaxed. What follows is an extract from a talk-and-stroll session along the canal to the Hitchcock statue in the



Pedal power: Andrew Kötting and Iain Sinclair take to the water on 'Edith'

grounds of what used to be Gainsborough Studios, with me clutching my voice recorder, and Sinclair and Kötting talking over one another as only two collaborators can, giving me a soundtrack that in terms of decipherment is not unlike a Robert Altman scene.

**Andrew Kötting:** Up here [above the tunnel] was one of our first beatings of the bounds. We did a massive walk that day – it was about nine or ten hours, and you were grizzling like a baby at the end. Your feet were all swollen up.

**Iain Sinclair:** We walked the whole way around Hackney and finished up right alongside the New River. Suddenly, as we sat down, we were completely surrounded by swans.

**AK:** It was very omenic.

**IS:** Omenic. I thought, "This is it. This is the moment!" So it all cooked from Hackney.

**AK:** But that was way back, probably three years before we thought we might actually be doing it.

**IS:** There's all this seething underhistory of London. Right behind us in Noel Road is where Joe Orton got killed – who became a figure in the story because when we walked the Isle of Sheppey on a recce, I was telling Andrew about the prison complex [where Orton served time]. And at that moment this character appeared – a shaven-headed, tattooed crab-sexer.

**AK:** He was a big football fan – he was all pumped up. And I said, "Who do you support, then?" He went, "I'm ICF [Inter City Firm]. How about you?" And then Iain tries to interject with, [puts on Sinclair-type voice] "Do you

.....  
**Everybody in the pub was shouting, 'Duck-boy, did you get to France?'**  
.....

realise that out there on the island Joe Orton..." And he said, "Well, I'm collecting crabs." He had no interest whatsoever...

**IS:** But he did. I was there! He said, "The one [prison] at the top of the hill was for the serious psychos – that's where I was. And the bottom one [where Orton was] was a bit nancy." So we had a whole riff on the prison.

**AK:** He'd been there for six years.

**IS:** A bit of domestic.

**AK:** He gave us a beautiful psychogeographical insight.

**IS:** That was the essence of the whole film... The thing I had to kill was this malign enclosure of the lower Lea Valley [the Olympics site] – this octopus spirit that was crushing London. I wanted a pilgrimage quest against it. Andrew said, "No, that's not what it's about."

**AK:** I wanted that to be more of a sidebar...

**IS:** I was happy that it would go [ie be cut out of the film], but in the end Andrew has done exactly what I wanted by creating a kind of absurdist alternate spirit that is truthful because it moved across England and touched all those contour lines of culture, with the tattooed riverbank people and the fishermen – all of these characters who are in this Cartier-Bresson sort

of panorama. We'd come through that and suddenly hit this toxic river [the Thames].

[We pass the Narrow Boat pub on the canal in Islington.]

**AK:** When we came past here on the swan, [the pub] was full of people shouting. We had loads of that as we came past. I had to do a 360-degree turn and show off Edith to them, and they were full of praise. One of them seemed to know the guy that had stolen a pedalo a couple of weeks before we set sail from Hastings. It was for an attempt to pedal across the channel to get some duty-frees cheap! Everybody in the pub assumed it was us. They were shouting, "Duck-boy, did you get to France?"

**IS:** Within 24 hours of us putting to sea in the swan, two more were taken. One was abandoned a mile out to sea because the pedallers had got bored and abandoned it – which is what Andrew tended to do when things got a little too intellectual.

**AK:** Yes. If things got a little bit too clever, I was off.

**Nick James:** One of the difficulties of *Swandown* is the fact that you've got the cameras on water the whole time. You have to keep them still, and presumably you sometimes have to reconstruct things that have just happened?

**AK:** No, the cameras were tracking us the whole time. The hard bit was the health-and-safety issues that went with them. The biggest fuck-up was to turn round and see, not a camera, but people worrying about where we were going to spend the night, whether we'd eaten, worrying about the sea being too rough, about the tide coming in...

**NJ:** Whereas you guys are Robert Macfarlane types who will just bed down in a field?

**AK:** Absolutely.

**IS:** Well, he is. I'd ring up Anna [Sinclair's wife] to give me a lift back to base.

**AK:** It's just that he suffers from trench foot and I don't. There was no room for him in the minibus we were living in. But yeah, I could spend the night on the beach, on the towpaths. When you have that apparatus of industry, it becomes very different.

**IS:** But without that apparatus there's no film.

**AK:** Exactly. We wouldn't be talking to you for a start!

■ A longer version of this conversation appears online at [www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound](http://www.bfi.org.uk/sightandsound) 'Swandown' is released on 20 July, and is reviewed on page 77; 'Swandown – The Installation' is at Dilston Grove, London SE16 until 29 July





It's all too much: Yvonne Mitchell as Amy Preston in 'Woman in a Dressing Gown'

# Dawn of the kitchen sink

**Melanie Williams** welcomes the reissue of 1957 sensation 'Woman in a Dressing Gown'

It's received wisdom that the British New Wave effected a major change of priorities for British film, with a sudden flowering of all the "sex, class and realism" (to use John Hill's phrase) previously repressed in the national cinema. And it began in 1959 with the release of *Room at the Top*, which then inaugurated a series of so-called 'kitchen sink' dramas characterised by their industrial provincial settings and working-class protagonists, highlights being *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* (1960), *A Taste of Honey* (1961) and *This Sporting Life* (1963).

But what if the New Wave didn't begin in 1959? What if its point of origin was not the story of a cocky young man on the make in a Northern town but that of a harassed London housewife who keeps burning the toast? Made two years earlier, 1957's *Woman in a Dressing Gown* can lay claim to many of the pioneering features ascribed to the films of the British New Wave: its focus on the details of everyday life; its working-class settings (most of the action takes place in a London council flat, but pub, pawnbrokers and dockland timber yard are also featured); and its attempt at greater

sexual candour with its depiction of an extramarital affair conducted on the sly in a bedsit.

What's more, here was a 'kitchen sink' film that actually spent some time in a kitchen, detailing the thwarted, disorganised domestic labour of its heroine Amy Preston (played by Yvonne Mitchell) as she tries to keep on grip on her rapidly unravelling life. Her husband Jim (Anthony Quayle) is seeing a young woman from his workplace (a gorgeous Sylvia Syms) and wants a new start with a new woman who's everything Amy isn't: young, glamorous, self-possessed.

*Woman in a Dressing Gown* may be a slightly obscure film nowadays, especially in comparison with its much better-known successors listed above, but it was very popular at the time, featuring in the British box-office top ten for 1957 and also winning a Silver Bear at Berlin. It didn't impress all the critics, however, either at home or abroad: Lindsay Anderson thought it was closer to farcical theatrical revue than the realist drama it was trying to be, while Jean-Luc Godard dismissed its "incredible debauch of camera movements as complex as they are silly and meaningless".

Both critics, soon to be filmmakers themselves, picked up on something quite distinctive about the film which they disliked but which is also the

quality that lifts it from stolid social realism and makes it such a compelling watch: its air of sheer mania, from the jittery neurosis of the camerawork (by Gilbert Taylor, whose cinematography would grace subsequent films by Kubrick and Polanski) to its woman-on-the-verge-of-a-nervous-breakdown core performance by Yvonne Mitchell, who busies herself ineffectually with Sisyphean housework while her radio blares out *Housewives' Choice*. As one critic suggested at the time, Mitchell's Amy is like a wasp in a bottle, endlessly buzzing and knocking against the sides of her little prison.

The film's writer, Ted Willis, had been inspired by TV writer Paddy Chayevsky's phrase "the marvellous world of the ordinary" when he sat down to write his own story of everyday marital crisis, of what he called "good honest fumbling people caught up in tiny tragedies". But its director J. Lee Thompson, who had dealt with confinement and claustrophobia in *extremis* in his previous film, the capital-punishment drama *Yield to the Night* (1956), took the deliberately ordinary situations sensitively penned by Willis and directed them as Hitchcockian high suspense. The sequence in which Amy gets her hair done in order to impress her husband – only to be met with a downpour of rain as she exits the hairdresser's – is as gripping and tense as those Thompson would go on to direct in his riveting war film *Ice Cold in Alex* (1958) and his Hollywood debut *Cape Fear* (1961).

The mania and tension in the film may also point to something that couldn't be openly expressed at the time, but was nonetheless building up behind closed doors: a creeping discontent with women's domestic destiny. Amy is the absolute antithesis of the model 1950s housewife: scruffy, scatty and loud, she burns breakfasts, spills tea, leaves the flat strewn with undone ironing and mending, and rarely even finds the time to get dressed properly, preferring to stay in her tatty old dressing gown. But rather than demonising her as a defective woman, the film offers some reasons why she might have become that way (grief, loneliness, a narrowly proscribed life). In this way it can be seen as an initial stab at some of the problems with the housewife role, to which feminists would return in the 1960s, and which British cinema would revisit in later films like *The*

**The British New Wave was overwhelmingly masculine in focus**

*Pumpkin Eater* (1964) and *Four in the Morning* (1965).

Film historian Jeffrey Richards once called *Woman in a Dressing Gown* a "Brief Encounter of the council flats", and like that other great British drama centred on adultery, this film also concludes with a resumption of marriage and family over the dangerous but desirable disruption of an affair. But after the big triangulated argument with which the film culminates – in which wife, mistress and husband vent their deepest feelings and secret resentments, with extra angry input from the couple's teenage son Brian (Andrew Ray) – it feels like the genie has escaped from the bottle and won't be easily put back inside.

More revolutionary, though, is *Woman in a Dressing Gown's* demolition of the idea that women are 'natural' housewives. Amy seems to come to life when she moves beyond that realm: when she talks about her feelings on listening to Tchaikovsky, or when she's gossiping with her next-door neighbour about feckless men, or when she's defiantly telling her errant husband that she wants to go out to work rather than being looked after by him. By contrast, she's shrilly over-cheerful or downright dysfunctional when trying to please husband and son, and live up to contemporary expectations of what a woman should be.

Indeed, in its engagement with the world of a desperate housewife *Woman in a Dressing Gown* doesn't so much anticipate the British New Wave as go beyond it. With the notable exception of *A Taste of Honey*, the New Wave was overwhelmingly masculine in its focus and choice of protagonists, presenting a gallery of angry young men. *Woman in a Dressing Gown* offers something quite different, and that may have contributed in part to its lowlier place in the British film canon.

Sylvia Syms certainly thought so. As she once said in an interview: "There are certain films of that period that have gained enormous fame, the obvious one is *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning*. It was a wonderful film, full of brilliant performances, but it's about a man, and men have always been more important than women. Yvonne Mitchell did not go on to become a big international star as Albert Finney did, but *Woman in a Dressing Gown* precedes it by some time."

As an early foray into kitchen-sink territory – and as one of the most striking films about female experience of the period – it's about time this ground-breaking British film finally got due credit.

■ 'Woman in a Dressing Gown' is rereleased on 27 July, and is available on DVD from StudioCanal from 13 August

# Close quarters

Writer-director *Lola Doillon* talks to **Kieron Corless** about the complex power struggles at work in her kidnap drama *'In Your Hands'*

Lola Doillon's second feature *In Your Hands* (*Contre toi*) joins a small but noteworthy cinematic sub-genre centred on the fraught relationship between captor and captive, striking examples of which would no doubt include *The Collector* and *The Night Porter*. Films like these are hard to pull off, since the subject usually demands a confined *mise en scène* and minimal cast that at first sight seem more suited to a theatre than the screen. But that restricted palette can pay dividends in terms of a concentrated focus on heightened psychological and emotional states, and subtle shifts in relationship dynamics.

Doillon's film is set in contemporary Paris, where successful but single (read lonely) surgeon Anna (Kristin Scott Thomas) is kidnapped by Yann (Pio Marmai), who's unhinged by grief at his wife's death after a caesarean performed by Anna. Most of the action (if that's the right word) takes place in one small, dingy room, but Doillon manages to hold our attention thanks to a script that credibly maps the developing codependency, and two fine performances – particularly that of Kristin Scott Thomas, who, like her compatriot Charlotte Rampling, seems regularly to find far richer and more complex roles in France than she does in her native UK.

**Kieron Corless: How did you first start working in cinema?**

**Lola Doillon:** My mother [Noëlle Boisson] was a film editor – she recently retired. My father is the director Jacques Doillon. So I was born in the movies, and for 15 years I did lots of jobs such as editing assistant, casting director, first AD, for different people and different films, including my father's. Then I started to write and direct my own films, first some shorts, then a debut feature called *Et toi, t'es sur qui?* [2007], a film about teenagers that showed in Cannes. This is my second film.

**KC: How did this one come about?**

**LD:** I was curious about Stockholm syndrome and hostage situations in countries such as Colombia, and in particular women hostages – how can you live alone with a man who kidnapped you, sometimes for two to three years? First I came up with two characters: a woman who is in control of herself, and this young man who's the reverse, just following



his emotions. I put them in the same room, and then tried to just go with it. I didn't want to have 'poor victim' and 'bad guy', like he's a gangster. He's just a dispirited guy. I really tried hard to understand both characters. And of course they are very different socially too – in real life they couldn't meet.

**KC: Did you talk to any people who had been in this situation?**

**LD:** I talked to a woman who'd been kidnapped and raped – it was a huge story. I didn't want to just shoot that, her story and her reactions – everybody would react in a different way. It transpired that Kristin Scott Thomas had a very good friend who'd been kidnapped, which was very strange. She called her and asked her



'In Your Hands', above, by Lola Doillon, top

**I didn't really try to do a horror film. But it's not really romantic either**

how she reacted. So we had those two stories, and we tried to mix them in with what we had imagined.

**KC: How much input did your two actors have into the way the story developed?**

**LD:** I was very open to what they felt about their characters, and I also asked if we could shoot sequentially. Because I think it was always very important to ask, "Will she (and he) react like that now?" It turned out quite like the script, but sometimes it was, "OK, she wouldn't say that because it doesn't ring true." So it was really the work of three of us.

**KC: And there are subtle shifts in viewer identification: you feel more sympathy for her at first, but then it becomes deeper and more complicated.**

**LD:** I chose two characters who are very lonely, so they need someone – because of the situation, the extreme

feelings involved. The other person is not a mirror exactly, but after a while they have no carapace, their feelings are naked.

**KC: Is it almost a strange kind of love they end up experiencing?**

**LD:** I can't tell if it's love, this need for the other person. In the first script I wrote, I tried to find a happy ending, but it was not possible. You can't imagine them just going to a restaurant, hand in hand.

**KC: The woman seems to recognise this more quickly than the man, when she says, "Outside this room we can't exist."**

**LD:** I think it's because she's older. She knows more – she knows it's not possible. But I think he knows too, but nevertheless he wants to trust somebody.

**KC: How did Kristin Scott Thomas get involved? I'm guessing the budget wasn't huge.**

**LD:** I thought about her when I was writing. I needed someone to focus on: a beautiful woman, but one in control. So I wrote the script thinking about her. Then I sent her the script, and a week later she said yes. I was like, "Wow, what now? What am I going to do?" And I thought she'd say no when she saw the budget, but she still accepted. I think it's rare that an actress like that will say yes to only a director's second film, and without any money, but she wanted the role. And she really helped me. It was not like she wanted to order me about or do her own film. She was really on my wavelength about how to act and how to do things.

**KC: What was the response in France?**

**LD:** A lot of people remarked that it it's most frightening. That's OK, as I didn't really try to do a horror film. But it's not really romantic either. You don't know what's going to happen, how he's going to react, what he's going to do to her. You are suspended between two points.

**KC: With effectively just two characters in your film, did you feel it was necessary to bring the actors together before the shoot, to gauge how much chemistry there was between them?**

**LD:** I thought it was better they didn't know each other before – not to prepare too much. You can't really know how it will be when you're closed up in a small room like that. And we did it in a studio – we built the little room, so with a small crew we were really like an enclosed family. It was very intense. You yearn to go out! But at the same time it was a strangely nice feeling being in that claustrophobic room.

■ *'In Your Hands'* is released on 20 July, and is reviewed on page 61



# Goodbye to all that

The day I got back from Cannes this year, the front page of *The Sunday Times* was dominated by a picture of Nicole Kidman at the premiere of the HBO TV movie *Hemingway & Gellhorn*. But this wasn't what the story was really about: as I read on, I realised that Kidman's red-carpet moment was simply a slightly long introduction to the paper's coverage of the massacre in Houla, which had been happening as Kidman mounted the steps. The link came from the fact that Kidman had paid tribute to Marie Colvin, the *Sunday Times* journalist killed in Syria in March.

I've been around newspapers for long enough to guess what happened: the front page had been put to bed, celebrity snapshot and all, by the time the Houla story broke, and some beleaguered night editor, doubtless repeatedly warned about the cost of redoing layouts, had taken the decision to tack Houla onto the red-carpet report. All the same, it was an appalling thing to do. And I am going to do something equally tasteless and say that the event helped, as I write my final column, bring into focus a lot of the things I have been thinking about film festivals.

One of those things is that they take place in a different moral universe where, quite possibly, a nice pic of Nicole does 'count' more than a massacre. What I have always called the 'cruise-liner' world of festivals, especially Cannes – several thousand people cooped up in the same narrow strip of land for ten days, eating the same food, experiencing the same entertainment, meeting and re-meeting the same people – relies on the real world being kept at bay.

To a degree, this is inevitable: in at least one respect, film festivals are best seen as machines for converting bullshit into glamour. They are one of the last bastions of Hedda Hopper's Hollywood, where gossip is endlessly recycled and a movie star promoting a movie will always make the front page. But the extent to which festivals have become assimilated into the film business seems to me increasingly problematic. At the start of the film-festival phenomenon (Venice 1932, picking up a bit of speed at Cannes in 1946 and achieving full lift-off with Berlin in 1951), they did what it said on the can: offered prestigious, star-studded events designed to celebrate cinema – and, while they were at it, bring a bit of kudos to their sponsors (Mussolini, the Riviera recovering after World War II, Cold-War Berlin).

Then, in the mid-1980s, the independent film business moved in, using festivals as an opportunity to



**Film festivals are best seen as machines for converting bullshit into glamour, where gossip is endlessly recycled and a movie star promoting a movie will always make the front page**

get together with international clients and to build a distribution network that was independent of the Hollywood studios without necessarily being arthouse. Not far behind came the publicly funded bodies – the various national film institutes, foundations, councils and funds. But even these were little more than an advance guard for the mummy of them all, the MEDIA Programme of the European Union. And in its wake came the conferences, production platforms, co-production markets, pitching sessions and various training initiatives that now vie for the attention of any non-corporate individual foolish (or rich) enough to rock up for ten days of fun in the sun.

I don't have to remind anyone that the only film-related coverage a journalist can sell these days is celebrity-driven, with bonus points if the celeb in question is having a bad hair day in his or her private life. (Only in Cannes could I find myself, as I did on 22 May this year, hurrying from an interview with Ronan Keating to one with Alain Resnais.) But I do think I need to comment on the extent to which film festivals everywhere have come to focus not so much on films as on the business of film and its subsidised, public-sector equivalent.

When I worked for the trades, I took this for granted: the festival provided the alibi – or, if you prefer, the excuse – for being in Berlin, Cannes, Venice etc, and the fact that everyone you needed to do business with was within walking distance (or,

at the top end of the market, a short heli-hop away) supplied the justification. But the Topsy-like growth of what, in terms of the original brief, are festival hangers-on has begun to get in the way. Film festivals have institutionalised themselves into a kind of federation of loosely related states: culture, celebrity, business, public policy, all grown used to doing their thing, year in, year out, like a family returning to the same caravan park for its annual holiday.

At this turning-point in the history of cinema, festivals have a key role to play: providing a public platform for the new talent, new voices, new forms which the Hollywood pipelines will not carry. But the present festival set-up, fixed at some moment in the collective memory when it is forever 1988, hinders rather than promotes this, based on models that privilege the middleman over the consumer, the delivery method over demand. Festivals have a vital role to play in the future of digital cinema, but they need to clear the decks a bit first.

Or that's what I think after 20 years of writing this column (the first one appeared in *S&S*, in a rather less self-serving format, in May 1993, so long ago that my software can no longer open the file). I have been trying for some time to come up with a pithy, culturally laden sign-off phrase. I've failed. But then, how could I improve – given its tone of ironic regret – on Kenneth Williams's immortal line from *Carry on Cleo*: "Infamy, infamy, they've all got it in for me!"

◆◆ Nick Roddick

● **Steve McQueen** (below) will follow 'Shame' with 'Twelve Years a Slave', which is due to start filming later in the year, and has already attracted an enviable list of stars. Chiwetel Ejiofor, Michael Fassbender and Brad Pitt head a cast that also includes Paul Dano, Paul Giamatti and Benedict Cumberbatch. Ejiofor plays a man in New York in the 1800s who is kidnapped and sold into slavery in the Deep South.

● **Alan Partridge**, North Norfolk Digital Radio's king of chat, is finally coming to the big screen. Steve Coogan and Armando Iannucci will share writing duties with Peter Baynham and Neil and Rob Gibbons. According to Iannucci, "Alan is in Norwich. It's not 'Alan goes to Hollywood'; it's not 'Alan invaded by aliens' or anything like that. He's on North Norfolk Digital, which is taken over by a bigger media conglomerate... And that kicks everything off." StudioCanal has acquired UK rights to the film, due for release in summer 2013.

● **Alan Moore** has seen many of his graphic novels adapted for the cinema, but has never written specifically for the screen. But he has announced he is to make a series of short films with director Mitch Jenkins. The first instalment 'Act of Faith' was recently shot in London. It premieres at The Creator's Project New York event in October 2012, and will be released online via [thecreatorsproject.com](http://thecreatorsproject.com)

● **David Cronenberg** is reportedly in line to direct a sequel to his 2007 London-set thriller 'Eastern Promises', with Vincent Cassel reprising his role. Before that, however, Cronenberg is to direct the pilot for a new TV show titled 'The Knifeman', set to star Tim Roth, about a doctor in the very early days of medicine.

● **Raging Bull II** is coming! We're not making it up, though Martin Scorsese may wish we were – neither he nor Robert De Niro has anything to do with the sequel, which shows boxer Jake LaMotta in his youth, before jumping forward to show him between the ages of 34 and 73. Writer/director Martin Guigui reportedly has LaMotta's blessing for the project, which is being shot in colour and stars Mo'Nique as the young LaMotta and William Forsythe as his older self.









**A**t one point in *The Prestige*, Christopher Nolan's 2006 film about the rivalry between two magicians in 1890s London, Borden (Christian Bale) criticises a rival who has reached the top and lost his edge: "Milton's got success, whatever that means, and now he's scared, he won't take any risks at all. He's squandering the goodwill of the audience with these tired, second-rate tricks..."

That line might be read as an open challenge from Nolan to his rivals in mainstream popular cinema – that high-wire tradition whose reputation he has been upholding since he first captured attention with his second feature *Memento* in 2000. Each of Nolan's films since that breakthrough courts the mass audience, while also demanding its concentration. This respect for the engagement of his fans seems integral to the director's approach. In the era of *Transformers*, where much of mainstream cinema treats its audience with open contempt, Nolan's approach amounts to a moral stance, one that audiences have responded to – helping to explain the heart-in-mouth levels of anticipation among his fans for his new film *The Dark Knight Rises*.

The sheer ambition of Nolan's work has forced other blockbuster filmmakers to re-evaluate their process, leaving many floundering in his wake (Ridley Scott's *Prometheus*, for one, seems facile and ineffectual in comparison). Playing like superior airport novels with complex structures, Nolan's films unite members of different audiences who seek escapist entertainment but are weary of patronisation and pretension. His films allow arthouse regulars to enjoy superhero flicks and multiplex crowds to engage with labyrinthine plot conceits.

The technical virtuosity of his work makes it hard to believe that Nolan bypassed film school, but he did, making his first films – sci-fi mini-epics peopled by action figures – on super 8. While studying English at University College London in the early 1990s, he used whatever film technology was available, going on to collaborate with friends and his regular producing partner Emma Thomas (his wife since 1997) on the inventive short *Doodlebug* (1997) and his debut feature *Following* (1998). Both films gained critical plaudits and attention on the festival circuit, but it was his second feature, the radically structured *Memento* – starring Guy Pearce as an amnesiac on the hunt for his wife's killer, relying on notes to himself for knowledge of what's happened – that was his breakout commercial success. His first US film, it also marked the start of his collaboration with Wally Pfister, the American DP with whom he has worked ever since.

Nolan's subsequent career has been a vertical ascent. First came *Insomnia* (2002); a remake of a Norwegian *noir*, it starred Al Pacino as Will Dormer, a corrupt cop adrift in a nightless Alaska. Its success gave Nolan the clout to commandeer what was, at that point, a franchise in ruins: DC Comics' Batman. Nolan's *Batman Begins* (2005) helped erase the memory of Joel Schumacher's debacles *Batman Forever* (1995) and *Batman & Robin* (1997) by turning to the character's origins as portrayed in Frank Miller's dark, avowedly serious graphic novel *Batman: Year One*, first published in 1987. Following *The Prestige*, adapted from the 1995 novel by Christopher Priest, Nolan's 2008 Batman sequel *The Dark Knight* proved ➡



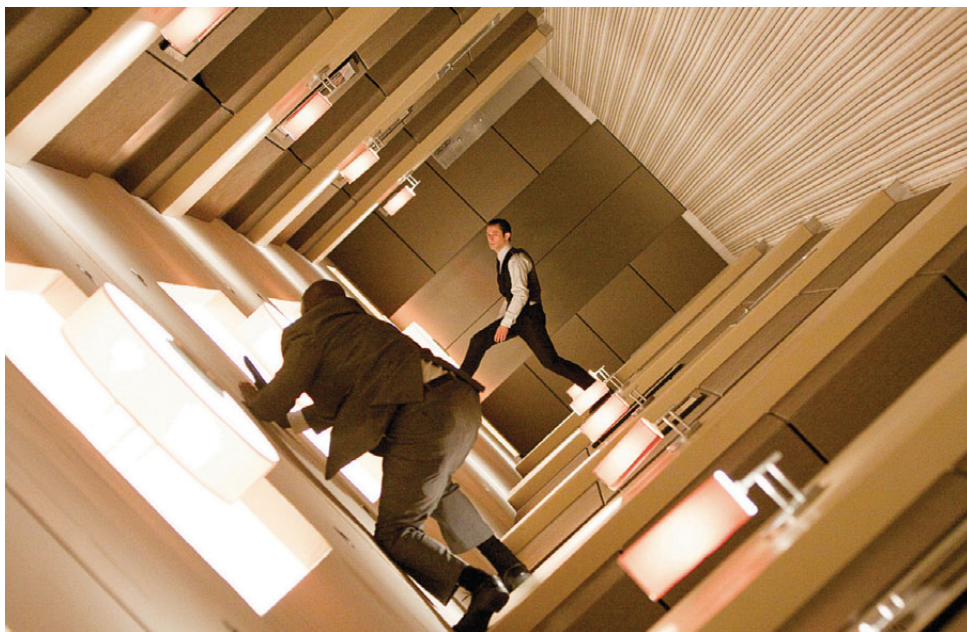
CONTOUR BY GETTY IMAGES (C)

**OUT OF THE SHADOWS**  
Bane (Tom Hardy, opposite) faces Batman (Christian Bale) in 'The Dark Knight Rises', the latest film from writer-director Christopher Nolan, left

*In the space of just over a decade, Christopher Nolan has shot from promising British indie director to undisputed master of a new brand of intelligent escapism. **Joseph Bevan** anatomises his body of work*

# ESCAPE ARTIST

# Christopher Nolan



## ALTERED STATES

From the top: the dream-world of *Inception*; Will Dormer (Al Pacino) in *Insomnia*; the Joker (Heath Ledger) in *The Dark Knight*. Opposite, Angier (Hugh Jackman) in *The Prestige*



his biggest box-office hit to date, aided by a barnstorming performance from Heath Ledger as the Joker. Its huge success gave Nolan creative carte blanche for his next film, the complex and ambitious *Inception* (2010), in which a corporate espionage group led by Leonardo DiCaprio's Dom Cobb penetrates people's dreams to steal (or impart) secrets. And this summer, of course, Nolan returns for the final part of the Batman trilogy *The Dark Knight Rises*.

Though the scale of the canvas has increased hugely since *Memento*, what's remarkable about Nolan's recent films is that they've all retained the *noir*-ish gleam, thematic obsessions and technical daring of his earlier work. The charge most often lobbed at Nolan is that he is primarily a 'technical' filmmaker. His films are said to be cold, and somehow lacking in the sense of personal revelation that is the stamp of a true auteur. But another way of looking at it is to suggest that they dissolve the boundaries between a populist and a private cinema. The epithet 'fanboy', thrown around derisively by critics and filmmakers assailed by the web hordes, may be the key to understanding Nolan. The director is arguably both the fanboy's fanboy and the redeemer of that derogatory tag, able to wrest the wonder of adolescent imagination back from the cynical and the hyper-critical.

In keeping with the fan's perspective, a strong element of wish-fulfilment informs Nolan's work – a desire to cram in as much 'cool stuff' as possible. His films teem with ninjas, superheroes, secret agents, tanks, corporate spies, magicians, stalkers and omnipresent guys-in-suits-with-guns. But all these elements are approached with a resolute seriousness. In this respect Nolan's regular script collaboration with his younger brother Jonathan (who wrote the original story of *Memento*, and co-wrote the screenplays of *The Prestige*, *The Dark Knight* and *The Dark Knight Rises*) is telling; their films seem to emanate from a shared imaginative dream-world, an environment of closeted yet liberating enthusiasm.

How you react to Nolan's recent work depends on the degree to which you consider the term 'adolescent' to be pejorative; certainly, there's an inhuman blandness to the Nolan dream-landscape – an unworldly, sexless atmosphere. In *Inception*, the arrival of gun-toting goons in the target's dream prompts the comment that the target's "subconscious has been weaponized". The line might suggest an untamed id gone wild, but the result is in fact a radical reduction of possibilities to machine guns, explosions and car crashes. The subconscious here has been infantilised.

This Peter Pan-like sense of never growing up is reflected in his choice of actors. Leonardo DiCaprio, Joseph Gordon-Levitt, Heath Ledger and Christian Bale were all child actors, and they present a boyish, svelte and resolutely un-blokeish masculinity. Nolan's preferred male characters are all techno-savvy fussy dressers. In *Inception*, Tom Hardy's Eames is presented as a Bond-like anachronism, mocked for his ruggedness, just as Bale's push-up routine draws a resigned smile from Michael Caine in *Batman Begins*. *Inception* is probably the first guys-on-a-mission movie peopled by internet creatives – a blockbuster action movie with man-bags.



But if Nolan's work is refreshingly light on machismo, it has little place for complex female characters either. Women remain stuck in the original archetypes of the femme fatale, the victim or the doe-eyed ingenue. Some of the actresses employed by Nolan manage to infuse his women with more interest (particularly Rebecca Hall in *The Prestige*), but others (such as Maggie Gyllenhaal in *The Dark Knight*) struggle in underwritten parts. The fear of empowered femininity that runs through Nolan's films is perhaps a hangover from the *noir* tradition. Any suggestion of aggressive sexuality or vulgarity tends to indicate corruption – as with Carrie-Anne Moss's traitorous ally in *Memento*, or the slutty schoolgirl in *Insomnia* who is punished for her licentiousness by Pacino. Nolan's women, it seems, are only to be longed for, mourned or mistrusted.

The adolescent's need for protection from human venality – and the near impossibility of finding it – ties in with Nolan's disavowal of cynicism in the moviemaking process. He's spoken of his desire to "portray dreams on film", but the attendant irony is that his dreams – and by extension, those of his audience – are themselves colonised by films. Nolan channels the co-opted imaginative life of the 1980s teenager, the delineation and exploration of one's own imagination through the prism of popular culture – the video shop, the comic shop, the film magazine. The young Orson Welles called Hollywood "the biggest electric train set a boy ever had"; in the rain-drenched initiating dream that is *Inception*'s finale, a gigantic train appears from nowhere in the middle of a busy street. This sort of thing is part of the charm of Nolan's work: an open acknowledgement of his own sense of wish-fulfilment, which brings him that much closer to his audience.

Escapism is both Nolan's greatest strength and a point of weakness, because it could be read as a refusal of any radical action in the real world. The closing words of *The Dark Knight* – "Sometimes the truth isn't good enough. Sometimes people deserve more" – could stand as that film's argument, and indeed Nolan's mission statement as a whole, but it could also be seen as a reactionary sentiment in a film that presents the general public as a dangerous mob of complainers only seconds away from panic and murder, who in order to avoid chaos must be manipulated by politicians, policemen, heroes and millionaires. As Slavoj Žižek has pointed out, *The Dark Knight* is an expression of "the undesirability of truth" – as good a definition of escapist entertainment as one might wish for.

And indeed the 'undesirability of truth' can be seen as Nolan's key theme, addressed in all his films – its roots lying in a fear of what might occur when the fragile codes that stop (in the Joker's phrase) "civilised people from eating each other" are broken. Those who violate these codes have been figures of fear in his work since the start. *Following* was influenced by Nolan's experience of having his London flat broken into; *Memento* is a nightmare about the loss of control, as is *Insomnia*; *The Dark Knight* is about the sacrifices necessary to maintain control. The thuggishly villainous figure of Bane (Tom Hardy) in *The Dark Knight Rises* is another embodiment of this fear.



BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE/SPECIAL COLLECTIONS (4)

## 'The Prestige' replicates in its structure the stages of the magic trick: pledge, turn, prestige

Guarding against this loss of control often entails moral compromises. Nearly all of Nolan's films include a scene where the heroes entrap and torture antagonists in order to achieve a moralised goal. Nolan seems to suggest that it's a human being's ability to fictionalise himself – to practise a performative morality, to make themselves into whatever they need to be – that redeems them. This self-realisation involves a choice. In *Inception*, Cobb's renunciation of his dream inamorata is a choice between one lie and what might possibly be a further lie: the catharsis of the unification with his children. In the same way, *Memento*'s Leonard Shelby (Guy Pearce) deliberately uses his amnesia to fool himself into comforting delusions – literally to forget the truth.

In Nolan's films, the only hope seems to be the hope of escape. Instead of the recycled Jesus myth present in many action-genre films, he uses mainstream cinema to describe an insoluble bind between pessimism and idealism.

### Cultural resonances

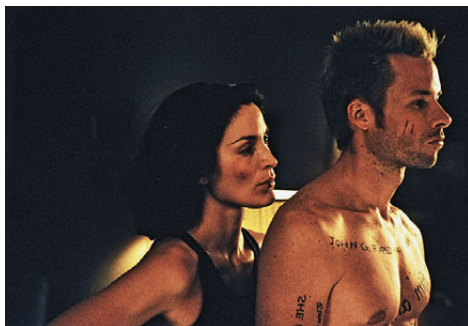
Though Nolan's films stay within the boundaries of his boyhood obsessions – which clearly include the work of other filmmakers – the cultural resonances of his films reach beyond cinema. In the comics and graphic novels of the 1980s and 90s he found a sense of imaginative playfulness that is the most obvious precursor to his own writing, and his films reintegrate that world into mainstream cinema. This penchant for reinvigorating generic tropes, cross-fertilising genres and manipulating narrative structures puts him well within a British tradition that includes the comic *2000 AD*, and in particular Alan Moore's *Future Shocks* strips, with their emphasis on meticulously imagined worlds and distortions of time and space. Likewise *The Prestige* uses imagery that harks back to the steampunk Victoriana of another *2000 AD* staple, *Nemesis the Warlock*. From

the US, Frank Miller's aforementioned *Batman: Year One* formed the urtext for *Batman Begins*, while Miller's 1986 graphic novel *The Dark Knight Returns* was an inspiration for Nolan's sequel. Where Miller's innovation was to graft the tropes of hard-boiled crime fiction onto the superhero narrative, Nolan's film seamlessly blended the tonalities of the cinematic crime epic – primarily Michael Mann's *Heat* (1995) – with the conventions of the superhero movie.

As a teenager in the 1980s, Nolan must also have experienced videogames. While it's hard to imagine him adding to the regrettable lineage of video-game film adaptations, he has paid direct homage to newer games in his last two films. The elevated shots of Bruce Wayne's speeding Lamborghini in *The Dark Knight* mimic the player's view in *Grand Theft Auto*, while *Inception*'s infiltration of a snow-bound compound echoes the *Splinter Cell* games, as well as the Japanese game *Metal Gear Solid*. These resonances also occur at script level. *Inception*'s dream levels are structured like the levels of a game, while *Memento* – with its emphasis on a lone hero picking up clues while working his way around strange environments – is reminiscent of myriad point-and-click adventures. Nolan may be the first director to openly acknowledge the challenge mainstream cinema faces from the videogame industry, and to reaffirm that the movies can be equally immersive and involving for the console generation.

Nonetheless, this forward thinking (which includes groundbreaking use of IMAX technology) is balanced by a traditionalism. Nolan has spoken of his loyalty to using film, and has yet to employ digital cameras – though he says this is simply because he prefers "clear, clean images, without filtration". Though he will use CGI discreetly, he tends to end any sequence in which it's used with live-action effects, in order to 're-ground' the film in an aesthetic reality. Nolan's production compa-

# Christopher Nolan



## NOTE TO SELF

The heroes of both Nolan's first two films – Jeremy Theobald's writer in 'Following', left, and Guy Pearce's amnesiac in 'Memento', right – are searching for stories

ratives reaches its apotheosis in *Inception*, a work of dazzlingly pure metafiction, where the creation of the dream functions as an exploration of the artistic method – a revelation of narrative within narrative that hints at endless microcosmic and macrocosmic expansion. Orson Welles once said that a successful artist should know the limitations of their form, and while Nolan knows these limitations, he also knows what to place at the boundaries to give the impression that the limitations don't exist. In *Inception*, using Escher's stairway as a model, the dream-architect Ariadne (Ellen Page) constructs illusions at the edges of her maze to disguise the limits of the dream experience, just as Nolan uses scenes of deliberate ambiguity to suggest that the architecture of the film might go on forever, in all directions. In *The Prestige*, the feedback loop created by the replicating machine means we can never know if it is the real Angier (Hugh Jackman) who dies at the end of the film or one of his 'replicas'. In fact, given the infinity of 'replicas' the machine can produce, we can never truly know if he has died at all.

Nolan's ability to stack various structures on top of one another is the key to keeping such mind-testing and structurally ambiguous plots accessible. Ultimately *Memento* and *Inception* have Hollywood dynamics at their heart, with turning-points and cathartic climaxes. The complexity of the films always allows room for traditional set pieces and chase scenes such as Dormer's run across the logs in *Insomnia* or Cobb's charge through the streets of Mombasa in *Inception*. Yet as with Hitchcock, few elements in a Nolan film have one exclusive function, so even these chases operate as revelations of character: Dormer is determined but tired, and on an unstable footing; Cobb is unable to distinguish between dream and reality, and ends up in an alleyway that shrinks to crush him. In an early scene in *Memento*, Leonard Shelby's entire psychological predicament is outlined by cutting straight into the middle of a chase scene – "Right,

I'm chasing this guy. No... he's chasing me!"

These multi-layered narratives work through visual acuity and brisk editing – and an unusual degree of trust placed in the audience to follow the story. This can involve massive compression of scenes – in the prologue of *Batman Begins*, Nolan takes us with an insistent economy from Bruce Wayne's encounter with a cave full of bats to his parents' death, acknowledging the audience's familiarity with the story while at the same time rendering it anew. He also implements a counterintuitive editing style of cutting away quickly from what in a standard blockbuster would be the money shot – such as the edit that finally silences the cackling of the Joker in *The Dark Knight*, cutting him off abruptly so his final laugh sounds more like a squeal of pain.

Editing is also used to represent psychological states and merge the characters' subjectivity with that of the audience. (Since *Batman Begins*, Nolan's films have been edited by Lee Smith, otherwise best known for his work with Peter Weir.) Taking the term flashback literally, Nolan intercuts near-subliminal images to suggest Dormer's guilty recollection of past events in *Insomnia*, or to show us a young Bruce Wayne's fear at the bat-like figures tumbling from the opera-house ceiling in *Batman Begins*. In scenes of disorientation – as when Dormer is lost in the fog in *Insomnia* – the editing comes close to abstraction, as it does in moments of perceptual distortion, with camera tricks, ambient sound and subtle CGI used to summon the hallucinations inflicted and suffered by the Scarecrow in *Batman Begins*. (Nolan's long-planned Howard Hughes biopic, if ever realised, may offer a shift to more adult subject matter. Yet his intention to concentrate on the last stages of the reclusive millionaire's life suggests that this too could be a chance to convey psychological conditions such as obsessive compulsion and paranoia.)

While most action directors foreground violence, Nolan uses it tonally. The hyper-edited fights in the Batman films suggest rather than show impact. True, by halfway through *The Dark Knight*, the Joker has stabbed someone in the face with a pencil, disfigured a gangster rival with a knife and forced two henchmen to death-match each other with broken pool cues. Yet the presentation of these events is edited to make the suggestion of violence paramount – we don't see a drop of blood.

Nolan's cinema is driven by a need to entertain the frustrated innocent – the person who first loved movies, comics, books and games in their youth – and to help them transcend the limitations of ordinary existence, of adulthood. Whatever the implications of such high-functioning escapism, Nolan has yet to dishonour his pact with his fans. As Angier puts it at the end of *The Prestige*: "The audience knows the truth: the world is simple. It's miserable, solid all the way through. But if you could fool them, even for a second, then you can make them wonder. Then you get to see something really special... It was the look on their faces."

■ *'The Dark Knight Rises'* is released on 20 July.  
A Christopher Nolan season runs at BFI Southbank, London until 22 July

ny, whose logo is a centreless maze, is called Syncope, referencing the medical condition syncope, or temporary loss of consciousness. In the dream state created, the audience is asked to be creative, to wonder at possibilities, to formulate their own opinions as to the meaning of the film.

Nolan's cinematic influences, meanwhile, seem significant primarily on a visual level: Ridley and Tony Scott, with their atmospheric sheen and opulent production design; Stanley Kubrick for his epic scale and landscapes; Michael Mann, whose architectural stylings in *Heat* and *Collateral* (2004) gave *The Dark Knight* weight; and even Michael Bay, with his shiny, chromatic look, pounding scores and elliptical editing style. Yet the closest comparison might be to Terry Gilliam, whose visionary worlds have much in common with Nolan's – albeit with whimsy and mischief in place of the younger man's brooding morbidity. *Inception* is particularly indebted to Gilliam's *Time Bandits* (1981), with its collapse further and further into other realities, and its uncertainty as to the existence of a true north.

## Structural complexity

Though *Memento* can be seen as an inversion of Jorge Luis Borges's story 'Funes the Memorious', in which a man forgets literally nothing that he experiences, the literary influences on Nolan's work seem largely structural, with films providing the content. As an English-literature graduate, Nolan has talked of how he learned to appreciate the "narrative freedoms enjoyed by writers", and it can be argued that his work is led primarily by an interest in structural complexity and innovation. All of his films involve concealed stories, obfuscation, misdirection, and metafictional elements. *The Prestige* replicates in its structure the stages of the magic trick: the 'pledge', the 'turn' and the 'prestige'. *The Dark Knight* revolves around the hidden narrative of what the Joker is doing when off screen – a narrative hinted at but left entirely open to the audience's imagination. *Memento*'s dual structure revolves around the disjunct between the delusional revenge narrative that the amnesiac Leonard Shelby has designed for himself and the hidden narrative – that of a man who deliberately forgets the truth in order to have a reason to live. On *Following*, the script – about a writer who follows strangers in search of stories – was devised in such a way that if money ran out, what remained would still amount to a story in itself, thus neatly solving the problem faced by many aspiring directors of being caught in the limbo between short film and feature.

Nolan's interest in coexistent or parallel nar-

**As an English-literature graduate, he appreciates the 'narrative freedoms enjoyed by writers'**



# HAWKS AND SPARROWS

( UCCELLACCI E UCCELLINI )



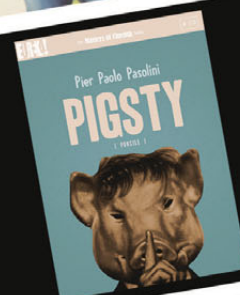
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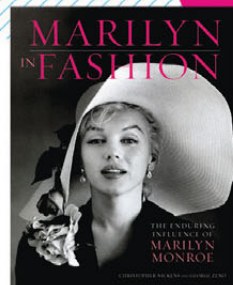
To commemorate the 50th anniversary of her death, the enduring legacy of Marilyn Monroe as fashion icon is presented in this new book published by Running Press. Illustrated with hundreds of photos, it includes her most memorable outfits for movies

such as *The Seven Year Itch* and *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes*, along with several more rare photos capturing her signature style. Everything from Marilyn's dresses to her accessories and make-up is highlighted in this visually stunning book on the actress. We have five copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

**Q. In which film did Marilyn sing 'Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend'?**

- a. Some Like It Hot
- b. The Seven Year Itch
- c. Gentlemen Prefer Blondes



### ONCE UPON A TIME IN ANATOLIA: DVD and Blu-rays to be won

Nuri Bilge Ceylan's 2011 film took the Jury prize at Cannes and now comes to DVD and Blu-ray courtesy of New Wave Films. It's a riveting tale of a night and day in a murder investigation, in which the dynamics between the main protagonists (who include the police, prosecutor and doctor) become the centre of the story as they search the Turkish countryside for a dead body in the company of their two suspects. The film marks yet another impressive achievement by Ceylan. We have five copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question and state on your entry whether you would prefer a DVD or Blu-ray edition:

**Q. For which one of these films did Nuri Bilge Ceylan win the Best Director award in Cannes?**

- a. Uzak
- b. Three Monkeys
- c. Climates



WIN

### THE KID WITH A BIKE: DVD and Blu-rays to be won

Cyril, a boy in foster care, escapes and sets out to track down his deadbeat father in this acclaimed feature from the Dardenne brothers, released on DVD and Blu-ray by Artificial Eye. A chance meeting with a woman who agrees to foster him at weekends changes the course of events. A moving tale of love and redemption, the film follows both this new friendship as well as the continuing rage and obsession Cyril feels in desperately wanting to be loved by his father. We have three copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question and indicate on your entry whether you would prefer a DVD or Blu-ray edition:

**Q. What is the occupation of the woman who fosters Cyril in 'The Kid with a Bike'?**

- a. Doctor
- b. Hairdresser
- c. Artist



WIN

### THE BRITISH FILM INSTITUTE: Five copies of the history of the BFI to be won

WIN

The BFI is one of the UK's oldest and most important government-supported cultural institutions. From a modest start in the 1930s it grew rapidly after the war to encompass a range of film-related activity including production, archive, exhibition and publishing. Based on intensive

research carried out by Geoffrey Nowell-Smith and Christophe Dupin, this volume published by Manchester University Press is a must-read for anyone interested in the workings of cultural institutions or in twentieth century British Film History. We have five copies to give away.

To be in with a chance of winning, please answer the following question:

**Q. What year was the BFI founded?**

- a. 1933
- b. 1935
- c. 1937



## HOW TO ENTER

Email your answer, name and address, putting either 'Once upon a Time in Anatolia DVDs', 'The Kid with a Bike DVDs', 'Marilyn in Fashion Book' or 'British Film Institute Book' in the subject heading, to [s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk](mailto:s&scompetition@bfi.org.uk)

Or send a postcard with your answer to either 'Once upon a Time in Anatolia DVD competition', 'The Kid with a Bike competition', 'Marilyn in Fashion Book competition', or 'British Film Institute Book competition', Sight & Sound, BFI, 21 Stephen Street, London W1T 1LN

The deadline for all competitions is Tuesday 14 August 2012

## TERMS AND CONDITIONS

- \* The prizewinners of all competitions will be picked at random and notified within ten days of the closing date.
- \* Employees of the BFI or companies related to the competitions are ineligible to enter.
- \* Prizes cannot be exchanged for cash.
- \* The BFI may wish to contact you to keep you informed of future events. Please indicate on your email/postcard if you do not wish to hear from the BFI regarding any other BFI promotions or news.

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**June 2012 issue winners:**  
**David Lynch box-set & CD** – James Harvey-Davitt, Miss Daksha Karavadra.  
**Rafi Pitts box-set** – George Barber, Tom René, Robert Monk.  
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Wolfgang Suschitzky's unforgettable work as cinematographer of the 1971 classic 'Get Carter' is just the tip of the iceberg in a career embracing documentary, industrial film and still photography. As the great man turns 100, **Patrick Russell** looks back

# GET SUSCHITZKY

**T**he titles begin. Light at the end of a tunnel slowly swallows the black frame with onrushing train track. Cut to Michael Caine in his seat, pan past his fellow passengers, via warehouses and factories speeding past the train window...

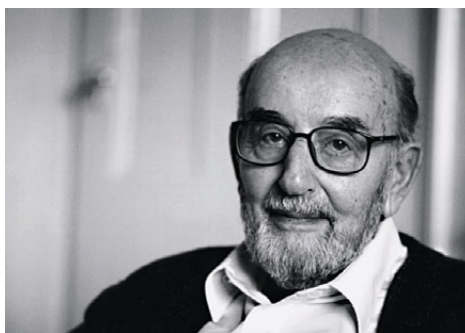
The iconic opening sequence of *Get Carter* (1971) forms, among other things, the junction at the centre of the criss-crossing career of the man directly behind the camera. Knowing northeast England, intimately familiar with industrial Britain, he doubtless feels at home, far from any studio, shooting mute footage of gritty landscapes. But he's also fluent with the human face – and with helping his director (in this case Mike Hodges) expose the truth within the drama, as well as finding the drama in documentary images. Director of photography Wolfgang Suschitzky was, at the time, pushing 60. Fast-forward to 2012 and he's still standing.

What is it about DPs? They may not all be long-lived, but there sure is a pattern. Stanley Cortez made it to 91, Henri Alekan to 92, John Alton to 94... Turning to Britain, consider Jack Cardiff, Freddie Young, Ronald Neame, leaving life at 94, 96 and 99 respectively. Christopher Challis died recently, at 93. Oswald Morris remains with us at 96, as does Douglas Slocombe at 99, and Slocombe's friend and elder: Wolfgang Suschitzky, known in the business as 'Su', who turns 100 on 29 August this year.

A few weeks before that, 19 July sees the centenary of Su celebrated in public (to the slight embarrassment, no doubt, of this self-effacing man). At a special event at BFI Southbank, BAFTA will honour this long-standing, still-active member with a Special Award for Creative Contribution, concluding an evening of tributes from colleagues, screenings of evocative extracts (some long unseen) and thoughts from the man himself.

Anyone with any feeling for the recent past is prone to a certain star-struck sentimentality when in the presence of people of distinction living among us in great old age. Certainly, durability is worth celebrating. In Suschitzky's case, his place at the head of not just two but three generations of cameramen adds a further twist: his son Peter, among many illustrious credits, is best known as David Cronenberg's long-time DP; grandson Adam, meanwhile, has done fine work in features, documentaries and, particularly, TV drama (from *Life on Mars* to the recent ITV miniseries *Titanic*).

But the romance of longevity notwithstanding, Suschitzky's is a rewarding and singularly



PHOTOGRAPH BY JULIA WINCKLES

## A LIFE IN MOVIES

**Wolfgang Suschitzky now, above, and shooting his first feature 'No Resting Place', opposite; below, the classic opening credits sequence of 'Get Carter'**

instructive career to look at. In Britain at least, 20th-century screen history was as much as anything the sum of its subplots. Though his camerawork was always excellent, Suschitzky's career wasn't studded with certified masterpieces of narrative cinema (as was Cardiff's, say). *Get Carter* is the exception in this respect (and was divisive in its day). Instead Suschitzky personifies the diversity both of the business and of the art of filling the screen: classics, cult items, curios; features and shorts; documentary and fiction; cinema and TV; industrial, charity and natural-history films; and, last but not least, innumerable commercials (most destined never to be documented).

## Connections

Wolfgang Suschitzky's career also makes illuminating connections between motion and still photography. Suschitzky is renowned as a committed, beguilingly gentle photographer of human and industrial scenes, animal life, occasional distinguished portrait sitters, and the world's children. There's much to be gained from study of the artistic connections between his work in the two media (a pair of attractive volumes from Austrian publisher Synema make a fine starting-point) – and the practical connections, too: it was film commissions that took Suschitzky to many of the places in Britain and abroad where his best photographs were taken.

Suschitzky was born in Vienna in 1912, to a

**After 77 years in Britain, Suschitzky retains his distinctive Austrian accent and his left-leaning politics**

Jewish (non-practising) and socialist (very much practising) family. Both of these allegiances would likely have lost him his life long ago had he not fetched up in London, via the Netherlands (his sister Edith Tudor-Hart, herself an important documentary photographer, settled here first). After 77 years in Britain, Suschitzky retains his distinctive Austrian accent and his left-leaning politics (he for one laments the decline of strong trade unionism in Britain's film and TV industries in the years since his retirement).

While simultaneously pursuing his photographic career, Suschitzky entered the movies while still in his twenties as a cameraman at Paul Rotha Productions – part of the Documentary Film Movement, whose civic commitment attracted him. In 1944 he was one of the Rotha employees, led by the charismatic Donald Alexander, who departed to form DATA (Documentary and Technicians Alliance), Britain's first film cooperative. He was an active member for 12 years. Hoping to produce radical documentaries, DATA became best known for quintessential post-war consensus filmmaking: the National Coal Board's cine-magazine *Mining Review* (which occasioned its makers' exposure to, and deepening respect for, Britain's coalfield communities).

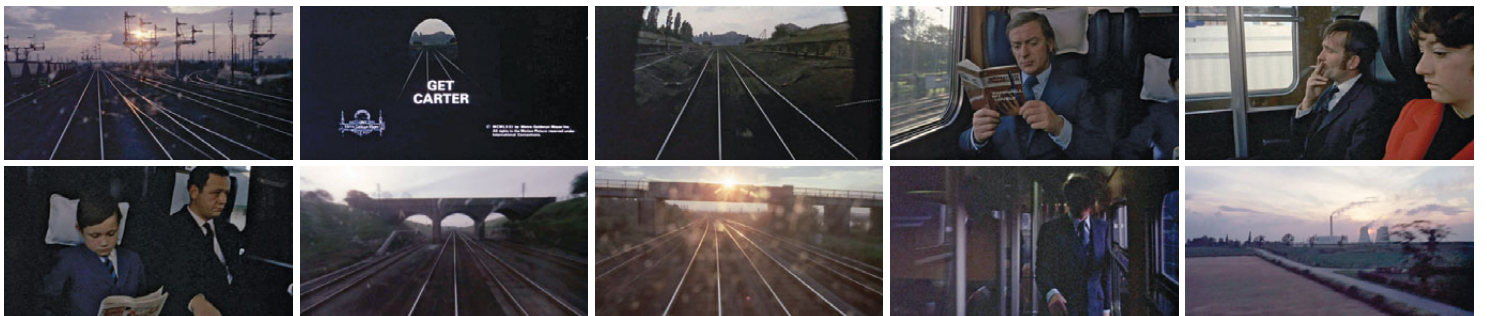
Rotha's fiction debut was also Suschitzky's first feature: the unusual Irish tinker drama *No Resting Place* (1951). Jack Clayton's *The Bespoke Overcoat* (1955) won an Oscar for Best Short, while Suschitzky's first foray into TV came via episodes of a Charlie Chan series. Through the next decade, he alternated quirky features, ads and a steady stream of non-fiction shorts (an increasing number of them in glossy colour, directed by such established but underrated documentarists as Sarah Erulkar, Peter de Normanville and Paul Dickson). He also worked with rising talent: for Hugh Hudson, for instance, he shot several corporate films and many commercials. From the late 1960s, Suschitzky was increasingly in demand as a feature DP, though he never abandoned his non-fiction origins, still photographing industrial training films as late as the 1980s.

Suschitzky has been retired since 1987. This lifelong filmgoer remains a dedicated one, regularly spotted at screenings. Usually with partner Heather Anthony, sometimes solo, he comes by bus, takes the stairs, and often ends his evening with some red wine. "Art can be produced with any medium," he insists, "but only in the hands of an artist. Unfortunately there are not many of those about. I certainly don't claim to be an artist. I am content if I am considered a craftsman."





PHOTOGRAPH BY E.R. ROBERTS, DUBLIN



# MAN WITH A MOVIE CAMERA

Over the course of five decades from the 1940s to the 1980s, Wolfgang Suschitzky's career demonstrates the breadth and diversity of the British film industry.

**Patrick Russell** picks 16 of the legendary director of photography's finest moments

**Children of the City** (dir. Budge Cooper, 1944)

This Paul Rotha production is a stark study of Dundee poverty. More social-democratic films would follow in Suschitzky's DATA years, including *Cotton Come Back* (1946), *Education of the Deaf* (1946) and *Fair Rent* (1947).

**The Bridge** (dir. J.D. Chambers, 1946)

Two-man unit Chambers and Suschitzky shot this fascinating record of reconstruction in post-war Yugoslavia, in tough conditions.

**Mining Review** (various directors, 1948-56)

Suschitzky's contributions to the early years of the world's longest-running industrial newsreel exemplified its strengths: unassuming, economical artistry, technical exactitude and a generous, unforced optimism that's bittersweet in retrospect.

**The Bespoke Overcoat** (dir. Jack Clayton, 1955)

Adapted from Gogol, this award-winning short bridged Suschitzky's documentary and feature careers, revealing a latent mastery of interior cinematography laced with ghostly expressionism.

**The Small World of Sammy Lee** (dir. Ken Hughes, 1962)

An excellent, energetic British genre pic, dripping with authentic Soho atmosphere, thanks not least to incredibly mobile off-the-cuff, on-the-streets camerawork.

**Lunch Hour** (dir. James Hill, 1962)

By contrast with *The Small World of Sammy Lee*, this flawed, fascinating curiosity, from a John Mortimer script, is improved no end by the way the photography accentuates its intense claustrophobia.

**Stone into Steel** (dir. Paul Dickson, 1960)

Industrial documentary at its most majestic. Elemental yet futuristic, this is silent cinema for the 1960s, in Eastmancolor.

**Snow** (dir. Geoffrey Jones, 1963)

A great short is a thing of joy forever. Several weeks' heavy-weather shooting yields nine minutes of gleaming camerawork, rhythmically cut to evoke – everlastingly – a notoriously bad winter.

**The River Must Live** (dir. Alan Pendry, 1966)

This Shell short launched the strange cycle of contemplative environmentalist films sponsored by oil companies. Suschitzky's evocations of nature, spoil and unspoil, were crucial to its impact.



**FILMING THE UNFILMABLE** Suschitzky was cinematographer on Joseph Strick's 1967 version of 'Ulysses'

**The Tortoise and the Hare** (dir. Hugh Hudson, 1966)

Corporate film with a difference. This novelty hit from the future director of *Chariots of Fire* is a thoroughly enjoyable, pleasingly dated modern fable, sponsored by Pirelli tyres and set on Italy's roads.

**Ulysses** (dir. Joseph Strick, 1967)

Joyce's proverbially 'unfilmable' book prompts an inevitably imperfect film – but an underrated, creditable, rewarding one. The first-rate photography reflects Suschitzky's absorption in a novel he reread many times.

**Cast Us Not Out** (dir. Richard Bigham, 1969)

Among many moving NGO films, this conscience-pricking documentary (directed, by the future Viscount Mersey, for the Jewish Welfare Board) stands out for its candour, clarity and caring attention to careworn faces.



**STREETS OF SOHO** 'The Small World of Sammy Lee'

**Entertaining Mr Sloane** (dir. Douglas Hickox, 1970)

This fine Orton adaptation was one of Suschitzky's frequent collaborations with the flamboyant Hickox, remembered by the DP as a man without "a subtle bone in his body". See also *Theatre of Blood* (1973), starring Vincent Price.

**Worzel Gummidge** (dir. James Hill, 1980-81)

The subtle camera mood changes are quintessential Suschitzky, crucial to the atmosphere – bucolic, autumnal, a little sinister – of this children's TV series, which lingers in the memories of many of today's middle-aged.

**Staying On** (dir. Silvio Narizzano, 1980)

This TV adaptation of Paul Scott's novel reunites *Brief Encounter*'s Celia Johnson and Trevor Howard as a British couple remaining in India after the end of the Raj. Suschitzky remembers being reduced to tears by Johnson's performance.

**The Chain** (dir. Jack Gold, 1984)

Ensemble comedy as social commentary, Suschitzky's last major feature is – in photographic terms – as deft a mix of locations, moods and modes as his career high *Get Carter*.

■ 'Happy Hundredth: An Evening with Su' takes place at BFI Southbank, London, on 19 July. A career celebration starts at 6:20pm, followed at 8:40pm by a screening of 'Get Carter', introduced by director Mike Hodges



From the director of Sawako Decides

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Filmmaker and performance artist Bruce Lacey has been doing his own thing for over half a century. To coincide with a BFI retrospective, **William Fowler** surveys Lacey's unique body of work, while overleaf, **Jeremy Deller** and **Nick Abrahams** pay tribute

# SHOWTIME: THE FILM WORLD OF BRUCE LACEY

**R**egrettably off our beat" is how film critic Raymond Durgnat described the Goonish experimental short *Everybody's Nobody* (1960). Starring artist, performer and filmmaker Bruce Lacey as the Mobile Absurd Non-entity aka M.A.N. – a "synchronised, pressurised, energised, moisturised moron" – the film playfully rips apart the factory-produced 'ideal home'-type lifestyle aggressively marketed in the post-war era. With nuclear Armageddon then a very real possibility – as referenced in the film – Lacey and co-director John Sewell clearly did not concur with the notion "we've never had it so good" proffered by Prime Minister Harold Macmillan. The film's as playful, vicious and inventive as anything being made in the USA at that time, but like so much of Lacey's other film work, it's been little seen for years.

Now well into his eighties, and still at work on a variety of projects at his home in Norfolk, Lacey himself remains somehow 'off our beat'. But it wasn't always that way. Overspilling with energy, he was something of an omnipresent force in 1960s London – known for his unpredictable humour and strong political views, as well as for his wide-ranging art practice and his construction of all manner of mechanical sci-fi devices. Films, assemblages and interactive environments were all exhibited in the vibrant underground art/happenings scene of the day. Lacey also made regular appearances in TV shows and films, stepping out with the likes of the Goons and The Beatles.

In fact Lacey's art and activities have been so varied and ever-changing – then and since – that

it's almost impossible to pin him down. He's made props, films, paintings and experimental music; documented ancient sites, performances and his own pagan-style rituals; and presented comedy, multi-media community art and experimental theatre. "Many people who know me in one of my activities think there are in fact several different people called Bruce Lacey," he said in the catalogue for his solo show at the Whitechapel Gallery in 1975.

But despite their relative lack of visibility, it's his films that offer one of the few consistent paths through Lacey's rich history. He began shooting in the early 1950s, which makes him one of the first people in Britain to make experimental films after the war; Jeff Keen, Margaret Tait and John Latham were contemporaries. Attending Hornsey School of Art and then the Royal College of Art, he made *Head in Shadow* (1951) and *Agib and Agab* (1954) with friends John Sewell and Edward Dicks, both movies being included by *Amateur Cine World* magazine among the ten best amateur films of their respective years. *Head in Shadow* was described by the magazine as "a powerful interpretation of the wanderings of a blind beggar who seeks to find out the contents of a package he finds in the gutter". It prefigures *Together* (1956) – the Free Cinema film where artists Eduardo Paolozzi and Michael Andrews walk the ruined streets of London's East End pretending to be deaf mutes – by some five years. In Lacey's film, post-war damage and alienation are written into the form too: the camera is handheld, the editing choppy and elliptical, and the images frequently concerned with natural abstraction, as in the

tight close-ups of damaged and decaying buildings and pavements. Lacey played the blind man and helped produce the film – contributions that marked the beginning of his ongoing, idiosyncratic dalliance with both sides of the camera.

The 'Human Behaviour Films' made with his wife Jill Bruce (now Smith), and latterly their children, present pronounced two-way interactions between performing and shooting. Intended for Martians who might misunderstand basic human life if they only saw Hollywood movies, the films document such domestic tasks as washing (1971's *How to Have a Bath*) and – in *The Lacey Rituals* (1973) – making breakfast, putting on make-up, playing with horror action figures and going to the toilet (Lacey's particular method is discussed in bewildering detail).

These films are utterly delightful – and very different from contemporary film and video-art works also concerned with everyday activities. While they're as playful and visceral as, say Bruce Nauman's studio films, they're also very much about family life and family art, not just the actions of an individual artist. What's more, everyone involved helped to make them. So yes, Lacey holds the camera at various points in *The Lacey Rituals*, but then so does three-year-old Saffron – who is later seen operating the clapperboard too (the guts of the filmmaking process are all on display). It has to be one of the most charming and experimental home movies ever made – and in a way a direct counterpoint to the earlier *Everybody's Nobody*, where Lacey warned us how limited post-war human existence could be. Here, by contrast, it's chaotic, unpredictable and filled with delight.

This stepping back and forth between film production and performance – and often penetrating the dividing membrane – is a predominant feature of Lacey's filmmaking, and one that's analogous to his ongoing interest in fantasy and reality. Even the Human Behaviour films, with their concern for "real reality" (to reference Lacey and Jill Bruce's 1981 exhibition "Towards the Real Reality"), blur distinctions between conscious and unconscious behaviour, action and re-enactment. The children are particularly caught up in these oppositions; they enjoy the game but also want to present things accurately.

'British Landing on the Moon', a light-hearted Lacey performance – on the surface – filmed by both the BBC (1971) and documentary filmmaker Patrick Krell (1973), is more overt in its sense ➤



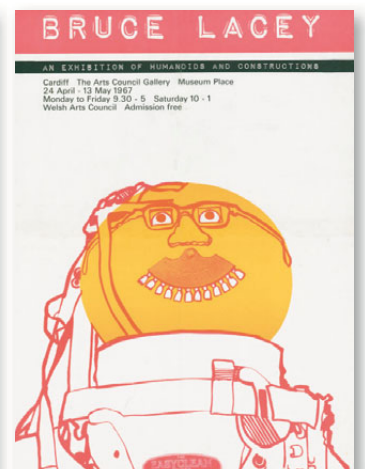
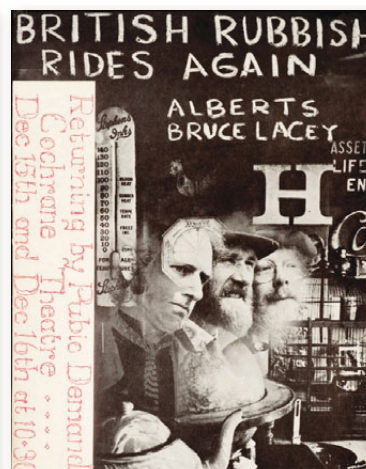
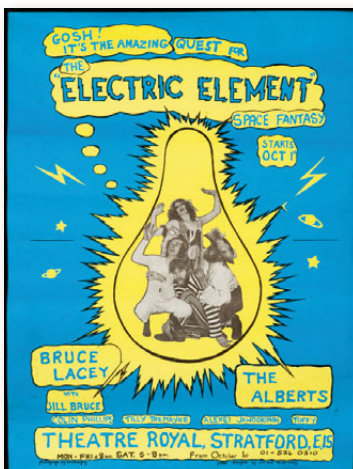
**BASKET CASE**  
Bruce Lacey as  
the Mobile Absurd  
Non-entity aka M.A.N. in  
'Everybody's Nobody'





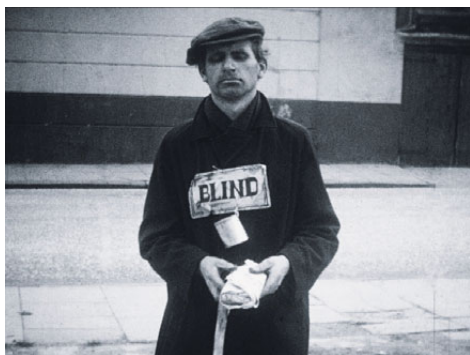
#### HOME MOVIES

With the help of his wife and family, both in front of and behind the camera, Lacey documented domestic tasks in 'The Lacey Rituals'; below, posters for his live events





## Bruce Lacey



### Even when Bruce Lacey is appearing in someone else's film, he still manages to imprint his larger-than-life personality onto the proceedings

of play and undermining of the real. Here Lacey makes a personal dream come 'true': to be an astronaut and land on the Moon. But he also draws attention to the nationalist politics of the space race and pokes fun at the British Empire – which, though still controversial when this was first performed in the early 1960s, was something Lacey did frequently in his collaborations with provocative, cod-Edwardian novelty jazz musicians The Alberts. When politicians present fantasy as reality and say “we’ve never had it so good”, then conscious, overt fantasy becomes an entirely appropriate response.

The fluidity with which Lacey negotiates this mixture of fantasy and reality, play and politics pervades every aspect of his filmmaking process. Even the act of showing a film became a performance, a personal interaction between Lacey and the crowd. Influenced by his time on British TV – where he made props for the Goons, among others, occasionally appearing in their shows too – Lacey and Jill Bruce made ‘film inserts’ for their own touring theatre productions. In the same way a location film sequence is inserted into a studio-based TV broadcast, they projected film in and around their live performances.

A presentation at the Festival of Expanded Cinema at London's Institute of Contemporary Arts in 1976 took the interaction between projection and performance even further, when multiple film projectors were pushed around the exhibition space on wheels. But even a ‘straightforward’ film presentation would invariably include a performance of some sort. The Human Behaviour films were often presented at art schools in the 1970s alongside other human ritual performances. As the *Daily Mail* blustered in December 1975: “The lecturer’s wife turned up in a robot suit and promptly did a full-frontal strip. Next thing, the lecturer squatted on a box in his Y-fronts and gave a running commentary on going to the toilet. This was followed by films of the couple making love, bathing – separately and together – and passionately kissing while eating a doughnut.”

#### Anticipating expectation

Even when Lacey is appearing in someone else's film – and is given enough time – he still manages to imprint his larger-than-life personality onto the proceedings, often looking directly at the camera as if to connect with the audience and

#### BOTH SIDES OF THE LENS

Lacey's performances for others, as in 'Battle of New Orleans', centre, echo the crazy spirit of his own shorts such as 'Head in Shadow', left, and 'Agib and Agab', right

break the fourth wall. In general, his comic timing demonstrates a keen familiarity with working an audience, anticipating their growing sense of expectation. He demonstrates it in films he made in the 1960s for directors Bob Godfrey – notably *Battle of New Orleans* (1960), a pop promo for skiffle musician Lonnie Donegan – and Richard Lester: *The Running Jumping & Standing Still Film* (1960) and the Beatles movie *Help!* (1965), in which Lacey plays George Harrison's gardener.

But for all his visibility in movies, galleries and on TV, Lacey's own 16mm films have seldom been presented in public – an exception being *The Lacey Rituals*, which was distributed by the Arts Council and premiered at the London Film Festival in 1973. Galleries rarely screened films in the 1970s (perhaps due to a lack of financial interest) and cinemas only showed artists' or experimental films in seasons or festivals. The London Filmmakers' Co-op was then the only regular venue for experimental film – but Lacey's work differed substantially from the structural-materialist films being screened there through the 1970s. While filmmakers such as Peter Gidal sought to demystify the illusionary qualities of film and avoid – or at least complicate – the act of representation, Lacey's films centre on performance, play and direct address. In a way, the two camps took opposite approaches to the same problems: how to expose the lies of modern life and deconstruct the tools of the mass media.

Lack of screening opportunities have no doubt affected understanding of Lacey's film work – a limitation compounded by his preference for presenting his films in person (there's definitely only one Bruce Lacey). But his films remain almost entirely at odds with artist and experimental film of any period in the UK. The visceral, absurd, cinema-of-cruelty moments hacked up by Andrew Köttling have their connections, not least in his *In the Wake of Deidad* (2006) project: a psychologically motivated, ritualistic physical act of doing in the landscape. But this is something of an exception.

Lacey's groundbreaking films and performances of the 1950s and early 60s were fed by his experiences in the Blitz, and during his National

Service and subsequent hospitalisation with TB. As the science-fiction author Brian Aldiss noted, after National Service in Burma and elsewhere: “The misfortune of a young man who returns to his native land after years away is that he finds his native land foreign; whereas the land he left behind remains for ever like a mirage in his mind.” In the same way, Lacey appears to have been addressing and acting out an inner alienation, not unlike the Fluxus artists and Neo-Dadaists in the USA. His early work was undertaken in an almost complete vacuum from contemporary American developments, however. He was even detached from Pop Art, which unfolded during his time at the Royal College – a movement that in the UK was largely pioneered by demobbed working-class National Servicemen who retained a passion for comics, movies and popular culture, and channelled their energies into painting and design work.

Although Lacey's work changed and entered a new phase following shows at Gallery One and then the Marlborough Gallery (1963 and 1965), it can still be considered peculiarly English – and English in an almost entirely unprecedented way. In the underground and experimental film world, he completely bypassed the influx of New American Cinema that led to the creation of the London Film-Makers' Co-op (despite having performed in the basement of Better Books on Charing Cross Road, where the LFMC was born). He has certainly commented, if indirectly, on American culture, but his responses have been grounded absolutely in English terms. His whole play with performance and engaging the viewer in many ways looks back to the music hall and variety shows he attended with his dad in 1930s Catford. There, performers played in character but also spoke directly to the audience, drawing it into the performance and transgressing the lines between fantasy and reality.

Whether he's making films or making robots, performing art or performing comedy – or pagan-style rituals out in the English countryside, for that matter – Bruce Lacey is not just a visionary, but also a showman in a very old tradition.

■ A Bruce Lacey season plays at BFI Southbank, London until 31 July; *The Lacey Rituals: Films by Bruce Lacey (and friends)* is out on BFI DVD on 23 July



# PLAYING SILLY BUGGERS

The uncategorisable oeuvre and enduringly anarchic spirit of Bruce Lacey inspired filmmaker **Nick Abrahams** and Turner Prize-winning artist **Jeremy Deller** to make their own documentary portrait of the artist, *'The Bruce Lacey Experience'*

One visit to Bruce Lacey's farmhouse near Norwich and we were hooked. It's somewhere between museum, junk shop, mad scientist's laboratory and sacred circle, and as we went from room to room it felt like we were stepping inside Bruce's mind – a collage of influences spilling everywhere, reflecting the sheer breadth of Bruce's artistic vision.

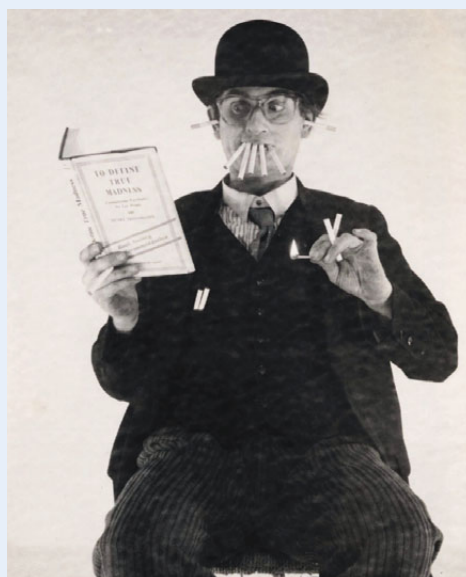
This is what we decided to try to echo in our film *The Bruce Lacey Experience*. Bruce may not be the best-known artist in Britain, but in our eyes he's one of the most interesting. Since no one was paying us to make the film, we could do what we wanted – which was to make a serious portrait of a true artist who has been making art and music at a bewilderingly creative rate all his life, and still is, always chasing an artistic vision rather than the easy money; a portrait of the kind of person who's truly worthy of their own film, but seldom gets one.

We'd first come across Bruce in a short sequence in the 1967 film *Smashing Time*, where he plays a nutty professor whose machines run wild, attacking swinging-London types and custard-pieing Rita Tushingham in the process. Then, after a chance encounter with the real Lacey at an art opening, we thought we should try making a film about him. (The two of us had previously collaborated on a film about Depeche Mode fans, *The Posters Came from the Walls*.) We saw it as an opportunity to document the inspiring life of a relatively forgotten British visionary, someone who's constantly poking fun at England and the English – with the vague hope it could come out to coincide with the Olympics and the Queen's Jubilee.

We also hope the film highlights forgotten aspects of Britain's alternative cultures, whether the progressive attitude towards play and children that Bruce took on the road in the 1980s, or the travellers and freaks who formed a fluid community at the many fayres and festivals around Britain at the same time (including Bruce's own totally acoustic Faerie Fayres).

It's great to see that Bruce at the age of 85 is still waving the flag for all things anti-establishment, continuing to deflate the pomposity that can occur in the shadow of Union Jack, and living life to the full as only a true bohemian can. It was important to us that the film should show that Bruce is very much alive, still creating, having fun and 'playing silly buggers' (a phrase that Bruce finds annoying – as it's how people have perceived his often very serious work – but has also appropriated to describe his indefinable practice and approach to life).

Bruce's super-8 films of 1980s festivals are a fantastic find for future historians: a hazy,



romantic vision of a lost Albion that was soon to come into conflict with the forces of Thatcher's Britain, and a document of a rural side of Britain that's often overlooked. The films are also very funny. And then there's the beautiful footage of the many trips Bruce and his then wife Jill took to sacred stone circles around Britain, performing rituals both private and public. It's a powerful archive that evokes a magical British landscape, complementing Derek Jarman's super-8 experiments, especially his *A Journey to Avebury* (1971).

There are rumours that Bruce was the inspiration for the original Doctor Who, and there's bound to be some truth in this story – he's the original 'urban spaceman', going on adventures both real and imaginary, living out his fantasies while forever tinkering with some gadget or another. His home is a temple to things that other people didn't recognise the worth of:



## URBAN SPACEMAN

As well as making his own films and art works, Lacey – above, then and now – has amassed a wonderfully diverse collection of junk at his farmhouse in Norfolk



PHOTOGRAPH BY STUART ROBINSON © UNIVERSITY OF SUSSEX

discarded parts of World War II aircraft are given a second life in the form of his robots; scaffolding is turned into stretchers for giant canvases; suspended models of aeroplanes fill one room, robots and spacecraft another. In the graffiti-covered toilet, a figure of Margaret Thatcher is barely recognisable after years of being used as a surrogate voodoo doll and ashtray.

Originally we only wanted the voice of Bruce himself in our film – an antidote to all the documentaries that rely on celebrities and talking heads to 'explain' the importance of the subject matter. But we broke our own rule to allow one of his nine children, Kevin, to give a perspective on being part of Bruce's family and, by extension, his art. We also wanted to incorporate as much great British music as we could (or could afford!), so Hawkwind, Add N to (X) and Vaughan Williams make an appearance on the soundtrack, alongside beautiful original folk music by Rob St John and electronic drones and improvisations by Bruce himself – extraordinary music that sounds like Throbbing Gristle outtakes.

If you have an afternoon free while the Olympics are on, and fancy a break from the official celebrations, you could do worse than make your way to the Camden Arts Centre, where a full retrospective of Bruce's career to date is taking place. I'm happy to say that our film will be part of that, allowing you to get some words straight from the silly bugger's mouth.

■ The film *'The Bruce Lacey Experience'* screens as part of the exhibition of the same name at Camden Arts Centre, London, until 16 September





**DUCK AMUCK**  
In 'The House on Trubnaya Street', opposite, Boris Barnet, left, shows us a carefree side of post-revolutionary Soviet life

'Battleship Potemkin' is a standby in 'best ever' polls. But what of those silent classics revived in recent years? **Mark Le Fanu** champions 'The House on Trubnaya Street'

# REVOLUTIONARY ROAD

**W**ith the results of *Sight & Sound*'s decennial 'Greatest Films of All Time' poll due to be published in next month's issue, I can't help wondering how many of the films chosen will be silent. There will probably be some, or at least I hope there will (*Battleship Potemkin* and *Sunrise: A Song of Two Humans* both made the top ten in the 2002 critics' poll). But the idea is hard to escape – even when it's shown to be wrong – that not to have had sound (in the sense of audible synched dialogue) at the filmmakers' disposal is somehow to have lacked one of the central pillars of cinema. Of course, the coming of the voice was a miracle, in its way – who can deny it? But the strange thing is that in the best silent films (as we recently saw demonstrated by *The Artist*), nobody really worries about sound's absence. Music, mime, photography, intertitles: in their heyday, these constituted a complete expressive vocabulary – in much the same way as in ballet.

Discerning cinephiles, of course, have always known about the depth and the beauty of the silent epoch, but what we've seen over the past 20 years or so is a vast opening up of access to

the movies in question. Probably – in the UK at least – this trend started in the 1980s, with Kevin Brownlow's wonderful restorations of films like *Napoleon* (1927), and the enlightened backing given to this enterprise, over the years, by Thames Television. (Thames has long since gone, alas, but Brownlow, I'm happy to say, is alive and flourishing.) Over in Italy, meanwhile, the patient work of festivals like Pordenone's Giornate del Cinema Muto and Bologna's Il Cinema Ritrovato has borne fruit in the enlightened enthusiasm of a new generation of amateurs and film scholars.

At the same time, the archives appear, at last, to have become user-friendly – competing with each other to publicise their hoarded treasures in optimum screening conditions, with imaginative musical accompaniment. Nothing can beat seeing silent cinema 'live', but it would be inappropriate not to mention, as a last link in this chain, the coming of high-quality DVD editions, with their extraordinary standards of visual clarity and their wealth of contextualising extras. The conditions are ripe, as they have never been before, to experience what Geoffrey O'Brien calls (in a recent and typically suggestive essay) "the rapture of the silents".

**POLL COUNTDOWN**

No. 1

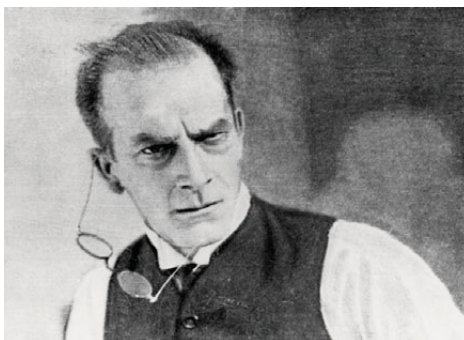




BY NATIONAL ARCHIVE/SPECIAL COLLECTIONS (©KOBAL COLLECTION LLC)



## Poll countdown The House on Trubnaya Street



THE NATIONAL ARCHIVE/SPECIAL COLLECTIONS (3)

◀ Among the thousands of films, then, that might be chosen to illustrate the beauty, grandeur and self-sufficiency of silent film, I have opted for *The House on Trubnaya Street* (*Dom na Trubnoi*, 1928) by Boris Barnet. This is partly because I've always loved Russian films, but more specifically because – among Russian films, and in contrast to the flavour of many of the better-known classics by Eisenstein, Pudovkin etc – this one shows genuine charm and merriment.

Interest in Barnet has been slowly reviving in recent years (last year's Bologna festival devoted a retrospective to him). A child of the revolution (he was 15 when the Bolsheviks took power, four years younger than Eisenstein), he trained first as a medic, and was then a boxer before becoming an actor in Lev Kuleshov's famous experimental workshop in Moscow. He began directing in the mid-1920s, again under the auspices of Kuleshov. *The House on Trubnaya Street* is a free work of art, produced at a time when artists in the Soviet Union were increasingly being asked to subordinate their individuality to the service of the state. So this is its first quality: a kind of moral integrity. It isn't beholden to anything, except the pleasure and ingenuity of its makers.

That ingenuity, in the first place, is structural: the film begins with a daring reversal. It opens with precious shots of historical Moscow: night-time initially, and then dawn – the crepuscular summer streets hosed down by water lorries. Into our vision strides a healthy peasant girl with a fat white duck under her arm, evidently in search of the address that is written on a piece of paper she is holding. Passers-by prove to be helpful or less helpful, sending her in every direction (except, unfortunately, the right one). While the duck's owner becomes more and more flustered, the duck itself escapes from her basket and skitters off on its own itinerary, our heroine in hot pursuit. Moscow is a maze of tramlines. Suddenly disaster looms: there is the bird in the middle of the tracks, with a commuter-laden

tram bearing down on the creature!

"Freeze frame!" The order is relayed to us via an intertitle, followed by the helpful suggestion, "Let's rewind the film to see how we got into this mess." And so we go back, so to speak, to where the story begins: a countryside railway station, where the girl with her bundle is seen saying farewell to her mother. Clearly, there's work to be had in the city; as for housing, the intertitles tell us, she can lodge with her uncle, if she can find him. Unfortunately for her (second nice gag of the film), as her train pulls out of the station, another train pulls in, depositing said uncle on the platform. Well, who said it was going to be easy?

So here she is now – or rather, here we all are – back on the tram track, duck looking panicked, vehicle approaching alarmingly, as before. Only this time it's the conductor's brakes, rather than those of the filmmaker, that halt the juggernaut. And as luck would have it, among the gossiping crowd that swiftly gathers round the incident, there's a friend of the girl's from her home village – employed, we can see, as a chauffeur. Not a diffident one, either: in his splendid new motor car, he's ready to offer his services, as guide and knight errant.

Her uncle's away, of course, so we next see the chauffeur taking her, as fallback, to his own lodgings – the eponymous house on Trubnaya Street, under whose capacious roof there is bound to be a spare room somewhere. Up until now, the film has been shot mainly in exteriors, a distinct part of its charm being the way it allows us to glimpse and savour forgotten corners of a long-vanished

**Boris Barnet's film isn't beholden to anything, except the pleasure and ingenuity of its makers**

world. By contrast, the interior of the house is studio-constructed – and what a set the filmmakers have built for us! Five storeys high, it is introduced in cross-section, splitting the building down the middle, at the common staircase. Here, in this common space, everything is chaos and cheerful bloody-mindedness. On the top landing, two men are chopping wood, vying with each other, it seems, as to which of the pair can dislodge more loose masonry onto the tenants underneath. Onto another landing, a housewife is busy sweeping the leavings of her private apartment; while a fourth tenant simply sweeps his garbage (dead cat included) down the steps onto the parapet below. Communism has brought all these Muscovites together, for their collective good. But the gene of petty-bourgeois individualism, it seems, cannot be eradicated so swiftly.

It's quite daring of Barnet to be so direct about this. It could, after all, be interpreted as a criticism – not of petty-bourgeois recidivism, but of the policy of forced collectivism. Be that as it may: among the tenants in this nest of termites, we are introduced in due course to one in particular, a lanky, ill-tempered dandy (profession: hairdresser) who lives in slovenly squalor on the second floor with his plump, lazy mistress. Wouldn't it be a good idea, they think, to get a bit of help in the kitchen? Grateful for any work she can get, our heroine allows herself to be installed in their apartment as the pantry maid. Very efficient she is too. In no time at all, the pair are exploiting her like hell.

The film will go on to outline, of course, the manifold ways by which hairdresser and mistress – and their Gogolian crew of hangers-on – will arrive at their well-deserved comeuppance. The 'message', on one level, is unexceptionable: one doesn't have to be a communist to agree that fairness and equality are important in our daily personal dealings. Thus the morality of the film can be summed up as a sort of cheerful liberalism; and considering the reefs the Soviet Union was about



## 'Outskirts' recreates life in a provincial township in all its freedom, idleness and underground eroticism

**A BREATH OF FRESH AIR**  
Barnet's other films include 'Outskirts' (far left, top and bottom), 'Miss Mend' (centre, top and bottom) and 'By the Bluest of Seas' (left, top and bottom)

to founder on in the space of a few short years, that's already something.

But in fact it's more interesting than this. If the peasant girl (played by Vera Marezhkaya) is nice enough in her way, the heart of the film centres on the hairdresser. Portrayed by the popular actor Vladimir Fogel (familiar to some from Pudovkin's 1925 *Chess Fever*), he comes across in performance as one of the all-time great self-justifying monsters – up there, in self-deluding arrogance, with Blackadder or Withnail. This of course is what makes the film so enjoyable. It would be going a bit far to claim that we love such a character; yet, in a strange way, it's impossible not to admire him – he so clearly takes the world as he sees it.

*The House on Trubnaya Street* is an exquisite comedy, but it's not in the least sentimental – indeed it's part of its general intelligence that its villain should remain unrepentant. Ticked off for his behaviour by a committee of the – admirably tolerant – "Trade Union of Domestic Servants" (I wonder whether that organisation lasted?), Fogel is last seen sitting hunched over a table, glaring defiantly at his persecutors. Whether we like it or not – and we do like it – his cussedness has a kind of integrity.

### Carefree comedy

*The House on Trubnaya Street* is by no means Boris Barnet's only film of note. There are several memorable works from much the same period: *Miss Mend* (aka *The Adventures of the Three Reporters*, 1926, co-directed with Fyodor Otsep); *The Girl with the Hat Box* (*Devushka s korobkoy*, 1927), a film I also love; *Thaw* (*Ledolom*, 1931) and *Outskirts* (aka *Patriots/Okraina*, 1933).

*The Girl with the Hat Box* is a comedy – you could even say a bourgeois comedy. The intrigue centres on the attempt of a greedy, feckless landlord to retrieve from his pretty lodger a premium bond of high rouble value that he has inadvertently put into her hands as collateral for some money he owes her. (What? There were premium

bonds in Soviet Russia at this time? Apparently. The film's even funded by the premium-bond company!) The girl, meanwhile, is torn between two admirers: a dreamy but Chekhovianly incompetent sub-stationmaster (our heroine lives far out of Moscow on a deserted, snowy branch line, commuting every day to the millinery shop in central Moscow where she works); and a handsome, poverty-stricken student she takes pity on – and puts up, inadvisedly, in the bedroom she rents from the landlord.

The complications don't need to be gone into; suffice to say that the film is lyrical, sexy and care-free. The landlord and his wife, as bourgeois-rentier types, are satirised, of course; but the satire is good-natured and cheerful, and far from the venom of class rancour. The lovers' kisses, when they come, are real kisses. Even at this date (1927, ten years after the revolution, with Stalinism closing in), one wonders how the filmmakers got away with a script that was so insouciant.

Barnet's knowledge of, and delight in, the theatre had always been congruent with realism. He had a great feeling for theatrical set construction, but an equally fine eye for location shooting. His films have a sure sense of place, and in this way seem reluctant to lie to us. *Thaw*, his next fiction feature after *Trubnaya*, is not by any stretch of the imagination a comedy. Three years into the Five-Year Plan, the feeling might have been that there was not much to laugh about. Set in the Ukraine, in the midst of collectivisation and mass starvation, it tells its story in the only way it was permitted to tell it – that's to say from the official, communist point of view. (In this way it resembles Dovzhenko's 1930 *Earth*.) To spell out the problem clearly: the film claims that the kulaks (Ukrainian farmers) were killing the peasantry, whereas in fact, as has long been known, the peasantry – aided and abetted by the local Bolsheviks – were killing the kulaks.

The outsider at this distance of time is hardly in a position to know what Barnet's personal thoughts about the tragedy were, but one thing *Thaw* can't be accused of is insincerity. The story is set in wintertime, and throughout the action a perpetual snowstorm is blowing, like a blizzard of hatred. Doors flap on their hinges, candles gutter in the midst of party meetings, messengers get lost, waylaid and murdered in the snow. All is confusion – and perhaps this is the point. In con-

tradition to its professed ideology, the film succeeds in showing, subliminally, the mischief of the times – the disruption, rancour and unhappiness unleashed by official class warfare.

### Decent humanity

With *Outskirts*, two years later, we revert to a more humane Barnet – and this despite the fact that substantial sections of the film are set (very realistically) in the trenches of World War I. But perhaps it was just this backward glance that allowed the film to escape, relatively speaking, the constrictions of political correctness. The revolution is still in the future; we can deal with how things were rather than how they should be. Lovely scenes early in the movie recreate life in a provincial township in the period before 1914, in all its freedom, idleness and underground eroticism. Yes, there are strikes in the shoe factory, and the riots that follow are fiercely put down by the Cossacks; but you're not meant to feel, I think, that these protests take up the whole heft of life. Other realms of experience – other sections of society – have their claim on our time.

The main plot of the film (we have now reached 1917) examines the love affair between a gauche but charming cobbler's daughter and a German captive who has been billeted in the area. These scenes are painted with great finesse and tenderness (and great humour too). *Outskirts* belongs with the wave of movies that came out in Germany, Hollywood and France in the early 1930s lamenting, retrospectively, the waste and suffering of World War I from a pacifist (or quasi-pacifist) point of view; it shares the decent humanity of the best of these films.

Barnet's early sound film *By the Bluest of Seas* (*U samovo sineyvo morya*, 1936) was also released on DVD earlier this year, and is well worth getting hold of. But in the post-war period his career faltered. Fearing (it is said) that he had lost his artistic touch, he committed suicide in 1965, at the age of 63. The history of cinema is littered with minor tragedies, and his is one of them.

■ *'The House on Trubnaya Street'* is available on Region 0 DVD as part of Flicker Alley's 'Landmarks of Early Soviet Film' box-set. *'The Girl with the Hat Box'*, *'Outskirts'* and *'By the Bluest of Seas'* are out now on Region 2 DVD from [www.moviemail-online.co.uk/hyperkino](http://www.moviemail-online.co.uk/hyperkino)



**THE GIRL IN QUESTION**  
Barnet's *'The Girl with the Hat Box'*, made the year before *'The House on Trubnaya Street'*, is an equally vivacious comedy



**ON STONY GROUND**  
In 'Nostalgia for the Light', Patricio Guzmán, below right, explores the Atacama Desert, where remains of Pinochet's 'disappeared' are still sought by grieving family members





Known for his radical political documentaries, 70-year-old Chilean director Patricio Guzmán is back with 'Nostalgia for the Light', which links his country's hidden history to the secrets of the stars. He talks to **Chris Darke**

# DESERT OF THE DISAPPEARED



**A** work of wonder and horror, astronomy and atrocity, Patricio Guzmán's sweeping, philosophical film essay *Nostalgia for the Light* (*Nostalgia de la luz*) is a cinematic variant of the childhood thought experiment in which you write down your name, address, country and continent, and in a kind of vertiginous mental crane-shot ascend to take in the planet, galaxy and universe, until the words run out and you're adrift in a sea of stars. Along with Michelangelo Frammartino's *Le quattro volte* (2010) and Hartmut Bitomsky's appropriately dry documentary *Dust* (*Staub*, 2007), it also belongs to a particular sub-genre of films about dust. From the least substantial material imaginable, these films fashion weighty speculations in which dust becomes charged with significance as a symbol of the borderline between being and nothingness, and ceaseless transformation. But Guzmán's dust is not your common corner-of-the-room tumbleweed, as the opening of *Nostalgia for the Light* reveals.

Now in his seventies and a political exile from his homeland for over half his life, Guzmán begins by evoking the Chile of his youth. Revisiting an old astronomical telescope at his birthplace of Santiago, he remembers how, as a boy, he "loved science-fiction stories, lunar eclipses and watching the sun through a piece of smoky glass". He recreates a domestic interior of the time in tableaux-like shots of vintage household objects: an antique sewing machine, a pair of embroidered cushions, jars of pickles on a squat iron stove, every old thing held in the honeyed light of nostalgic recollection.

Intoning softly in Spanish over these lovingly composed still lifes, Guzmán recalls a country in which "Nothing ever happened. Only the present moment existed." There follows a transition so simple in execution yet magical in effect that it's a pity to reveal it to readers who haven't seen the film. A cut takes us to an exterior shot showing the colourful facade of the house, a wind-tossed tree and what looks like a dust storm rising in the street; but the swarming motes sparkle with an unearthly lustre as a cloud of stardust swallows up the past.

Call it a cosmic dissolve or an astral travelling shot, it's a bravura transition performed with a conjuror's flourish, which also serves to establish the film's formal parameters and themes:

earth and space, matter and void, and time – cosmological, archaeological and historical. These are grand themes that Guzmán grounds in the specific setting of the Atacama Desert, a 600-mile long expanse in northern Chile, which is visible from space and reputedly the driest place on Earth. "I always intended to make a film which demonstrates the importance of the past, and this led me to the Atacama Desert," Guzmán explains. "The desert is like a planet of the past: everything there comes from the past. There are people, sure, but they're people on an empty planet."

This is not the first time the desert has featured in Guzmán's films. The final shot of *The Battle of Chile* (*La batalla de Chile*, 1977-1980), his epic, three-part, *vérité* account of President Salvador Allende's attempt to establish democratic socialism in Chile and the ensuing US-backed military coup, is a long take of arid land stretching as far as the eye can see: an ambiguous image of the Chilean horizon under the usurper General Pinochet. *The Pinochet Case* (2001), the second film in a 'trilogy of memory' that includes *Chile, Obstinate Memory* (*Chile, la memoria obstinada*, 1997) and *Salvador Allende* (2004), opens with the same landscape being excavated for the remains of people murdered under Pinochet's dictatorship. In *Nostalgia for the Light*, the Atacama Desert is both ossuary and observatory, and Guzmán interviews those who search among its bones, salt and stars: women still digging for traces of murdered loved ones, an archaeologist unearthing vanished Indian settlements, and astronomers surveying the heavens through the most powerful telescopes on Earth.

The apparent irreconcilability of such subjects (how to connect astronomy and atrocity?) provoked resistance from French television, which has previously supported Guzmán's projects; this resulted in a lengthy quest for funding, as he explains: "Everyone said to me, 'Senor Guzmán, this is a *mélange* of anthropology, archaeology, cosmology and human rights. What is it exactly?' I replied, 'You're right, but I've got 38 years of experience, so I'm capable of making something interesting out of it all. It's not going to be like it was made by a first-timer!' They said, 'We'll think about it.' And time passed."

Guzmán's wife and long-time artistic advisor Renate Sachse assumed the role of producer. "We waited for five years," he recalls. "In that time I developed the idea – there are almost 40 versions ➤"







**STAR ATTRACTION**  
The Atacama Desert  
is also the home of  
observatories, top,  
where the secrets of  
the universe are probed

of the screenplay – and it was fascinating to enter this world in which astronomy and archaeology have so much in common. So the delay was positive for the development of the idea, but we were in a desperate situation. Two friends lent us some money. Without them we wouldn't have been able to get started. Then, happily, Spanish TV came through and the [French state funding body] Fonds Sud said yes.”

Since its premiere at Cannes in 2010, the film's fortunes have more than vindicated Guzmán's commitment. It has been widely distributed and won over 20 awards, including prestigious Best Documentary prizes from the European Film Academy and the International Documentary Association in the US. Deservedly so; with its breathtaking HD imagery of desert landscapes and deep space, *Nostalgia for the Light* is visually stunning, philosophically intriguing and profoundly moving. While the film continues to explore what Guzmán describes as his “obsession” with the matter of memory, it does so from an unexpected angle: the memory of matter. “It’s a philosophical reflection on the relationship between human life and the life of the cosmos, on human memory and the memory of the stars – of infinity,” he explains. “As human beings, we are the inheritors of generations upon generations, going back to prehistory, and the matter of our bodies is the matter of the stars. We belong to the Milky Way – that’s our home, not just the Earth.”

Guzmán's lifelong interest in astronomy (which the film reveals to be a popular Chilean pastime) allows him to explore the nature of time when interviewing Gaspar Galaz, an engaging young astronomer at the state-of-the-art observatories atop the Atacama's high plateaux. Early in the film, Galaz calmly informs Guzmán: “The present doesn't exist.” The combination of the speed of light and human reflexes means that everything that happens happened in the past. ‘Now’ is a mere mental construct. “The present is a fine line?” wonders Guzmán in a mind-blown murmur. Galaz nods, “A puff of air would destroy it.” The implicit allusion here to the opening ‘cosmic dissolve’ develops the film's dust imagery into a metaphor for matter at the mercy of time. The pair's exchange is accompanied by an extraordinary shot of a constellation resembling a rough celestial cicatrice, and images both interstellar and earthly evoke the ‘fine line of the present’ throughout the film.

While he's best known for his documentaries

**‘The matter of our bodies is the matter of the stars. We belong to the Milky Way – not just the Earth’**

about Chile's political history, Guzmán has also made a number of essay films, and *Nostalgia for the Light* brings these two strands of his filmmaking together. “I’ve always thought that the authored documentary is somewhere between journalism and the essay,” he explains. “But it’s also a form of artistic work, so it’s necessarily subjective – a matter of intuitions, comparisons and the juxtaposition of interesting things.” And he acknowledges that his essayistic approach in *Nostalgia for the Light* owes something to earlier films such as *Mon Jules Verne* (2005), about the 19th-century French science-fiction writer, and *The Southern Cross* (*La cruz del Sur*, 1992), which he describes as “a sort of history of Latin America told from the point of view of religion; in its mixture of history and religious reflection there’s the germ of *Nostalgia*.”

One of the pleasures of this approach lies in observing how Guzmán forges connections between his subjects; it's not only the spectator who follows his associative train of thought but his interviewees as well. There's a telling moment in his exchange with a snow-haired archaeologist named Lautaro Nunes, when the director starts to talk about Chile's historical amnesia being the result of the enduring grip of the coup d'état and Nunes, who up to this point has been discussing the Atacama's climate, reaches for his teacup with a knowing smile, as if to say, “I was wondering when that would come up!” When I mention this to Guzmán, he chuckles, describing



it as “a moment of complicity” between himself, Nunes and the audience when the wager of the film is declared: can he make the conceptual leap between the different ideas of historical time at play without it appearing forced?

“Astronomers look millions of years into the past, archaeologists look back tens of thousands of years, but it’s the same thing,” Guzmán tells me, acknowledging the irony of doing this in a country that has yet to come to terms even with its immediate past. “It’s not only recent historical amnesia that’s my obsession – the coup d’état and Allende – it’s the 100 years of the life of the Chilean republic. Where are the histories of the miners in the Atacama, which had over 80 mines in the 19th century? Where are the Indians of the north and the south? All the indigenous people have disappeared in the same way they did in the conquest of the Far West. So I was very happy with Lautaro, because he suddenly revealed the true depth of the amnesia.”

## Museum of memories

For those whose personal histories are tied to its use as a prison and killing ground, the Atacama Desert remains a museum of traumatic memories. Guzmán’s purpose is to retrieve these memories, and the testimonies he gathers are remarkable. We meet Luis Henriquez, a survivor of the Chacabuco concentration camp – one of the former saltpetre mines adapted by the military – who tells of how he and his fellow inmates “felt completely free” thanks to the clandestine astronomy lessons they took while interned. Another concentration-camp veteran, named only as Miguel, recounts how his architectural training enabled him to memorise the exact dimensions of the camps and then make scale drawings of them when in exile, so their existence could not be denied.

Some of the most compelling contributions come from women from the town of Calama, who continue to search the desert for fragments of bone after 28 years – and in the face of official indifference. Vicky Saavedra recounts how it was only when the remains of her brother were unearthed from a mass grave that she could fully absorb that he was dead. All that was left of him were a few teeth, a bit of skull and a foot bone “still in a burgundy sock”. But, she says, “We were reunited.” Such details add up to a wrenching account of the agony of searching, waiting and hoping that characterise the experience of families of ‘the disappeared’. “We are Chile’s leprosy – the lowest of the low,” 70-year-old Violeta Berrios tells Guzmán, her features scored with grief and sandblasted by the desert wind. And she wonders what the observatories’ telescopes would reveal if they were trained on the desert rather than the stars.

Guzmán turns to astrophysicist George Preston for an answer, and learns that human bones contain the same calcium as stars, the atoms of which were formed moments after the Big Bang. By setting his interest in matter and memory in the context of such a vast cosmological timescale, Guzmán courts a kind of passive scientific awe, but the skill with which he develops his metaphorical approach to his subjects avoids

this trap; and in the film’s concluding testimony, astronomy and atrocity are brought together.

Valentina Rodríguez, a mother of two in her thirties who works at Chile’s principal astronomical organisation, is the daughter of political prisoners who were detained and ‘disappeared’. Calmly and eloquently, she recounts how Pinochet’s police arrested her along with her grandparents when she was one year old, and threatened to ‘disappear’ her unless they gave up her parents. Brought up by her grandparents, who taught her how to observe the stars, Valentina tells Guzmán that astronomy has helped “give another dimension to the pain, the absence and the loss. I tell myself that we are all part of a current, of energy, a recyclable matter. I feel that nothing really comes to an end.”

In the press notes for Cannes, Guzmán wrote that Valentina’s “serene take on events goes further than ours”; I ask him what he meant by this. “I think that she’d found a ‘solution’, in inverted commas, for her own mind,” he explains. “The metaphor of the atoms of her parents in the Milky Way – it’s consoling. It’s a way of thinking about things now, but I don’t know how she’ll think about it in years to come, when she’s older. But the discovery of atoms that are immortal – that are in us, that transform and don’t die... Well, it’s eternal life.”

Valentina’s apparent serenity is perhaps more than Guzmán can accept, but otherwise her account is very much in keeping with the film, which is essentially atomist. On the one hand, it’s poetically atomist in the way Guzmán develops his principal metaphor of dust, visualising an image that reaches back to the Roman poet Lucretius who, in *De Rerum Natura* (*The Nature of Things*), used little motes of dust swirling in a shaft of sunlight in a darkened room to evoke “the dance of atoms”. On the other hand, if one understands ‘atomisation’ sociologically – as the radical isolation of individuals from one another, and the concomitant separation of disciplines – *Nostalgia for the Light* is profoundly counter-atomist in the way it brings together the worlds of science and human affairs. Either way, it’s a masterpiece of transcendent (perhaps even transcendental) materialism.

Clearly invigorated by the experience of making the film, Guzmán is excited about future projects. “I’m continuing with this same obsession with the past, memory and the Earth in general,” he tells me. “I’m working on another idea, which is that it’s the sea – water – that is the memory of Earth. I’m starting with this as my point of departure and I’m writing at the moment. I think that *Nostalgia* is [part of] a diptych, possibly even a trilogy, because I have in my head similar images – well, completely different images, actually – of the same kind of reflection. And if things go well I might make a third film. I think it’s a magnificent subject to treat: the Earth’s memory!”

■ Thanks to Michael Chanan for help with research. *‘Nostalgia for the Light’* is released on 13 July, and is reviewed on page 64. A Q&A with Patricio Guzmán follows the screening on 13 July at BFI Southbank, London, where a season of the director’s films plays from 13 to 28 July



**LEST WE FORGET**  
Guzmán has chronicled his country’s traumatic recent past in films such as, from the top, ‘Salvador Allende’, ‘The Battle of Chile’ and ‘The Pinochet Case’



# THE GENIUS OF HITCHCOCK

*As part of the Cultural Olympiad, the BFI has launched a major tribute to our greatest director, Alfred Hitchcock.*

*Below, cult Mexican film director **Guillermo del Toro** pays his respects; overleaf, the BFI National Archive's **Bryony Dixon** on the restoration of the 'Hitchcock nine'*

## LESSONS OF DARKNESS

*Since his early twenties, when he published a book about Hitchcock, 'Pan's Labyrinth' director **Guillermo del Toro** has returned to his films again and again. He offers a director's POV on what we can learn from the master*

I revisit Hitchcock's films more than I do those of any other filmmaker, except perhaps Buñuel. I visit them like the faithful visit the Ganges. I bathe in Hitchcock, the infinite and merciful.

Nevertheless, in my own films I don't deliberately attempt to imitate him, either thematically or visually, and I would never dare to suggest that I aspire to achieve his power and reach as a storyteller. I know, in fact, that the only things I do share with him presently are his Catholic guilt and his pant size.

In my early twenties I published a book about Hitchcock and his films. It was over 500 pages long – a votive offering to a god beyond reach. I was not then, and never will be, alone in my devotion. Hitchcock is among the most influential artists of the 20th century. His films have influenced music, painting, sculpture, television, literature – even architecture. But the true measure of his influence is that we often describe and understand certain works of art, or experiences we have in life beyond cinema, with an adjective: 'Hitchcockian'. As with other giants of world art, to invoke Hitchcock's name is to summon up a flavour, a feeling – the essence of his work.

And yet it is all too easy to misunderstand what he brought to cinema. Many of his emblematic motifs have been misinterpreted or diluted

in genre efforts that seem deceptively close to him, but are in reality far removed from his true essence. Take the Italian *giallo* film, for instance – a fetishistic, stylish exercise in sadism that is often branded as 'Hitchcockian', but relies on a device Hitchcock obstinately avoided: the whodunnit.

Or look closely at those films that appropriate only the most evident stylistic mannerisms of his storytelling as proof of their devotion – even a brilliant movie like Stanley Donen's *Charade* (1963), which has its own energy and spark. It appropriates the same use of famous locations

we find in *North by Northwest* (1959), but it fails to integrate those backdrops in the meaningful way that Hitchcock uses them – which is to subvert their very essence, to cast them as hollow, impassive and indifferent symbols that observe the antlike humans in their life-or-death struggle. Hitchcock achieves the same integration of locale and theme with Mount Rushmore in *North by Northwest*; with the Statue of Liberty in *Saboteur* (1942); and with the impassive Egyptian sculpture in the British Museum in *Blackmail* (1929). *North by Northwest* is indeed a chase movie, but its real subject is an empty, shallow man in search of a true identity – an identity he will only acquire by falling from grace, hand in hand with a woman named Eve. In Hitchcock, style and substance are often one and the same.

It's interesting to see how many of the films of the first wave of self-avowed Hitchcockians follow one or other strand of Hitch's work, but fall short of the master's overarching vision. A film like Claude Chabrol's *Le Boucher* (1970) understands the thematic side of Hitchcock, but fails to adhere to the visual form. Conversely, much of Brian De Palma's work – with the exception of *Obsession* (1976) and *Blow Out* (1981) – is the other way around: it's polished in the formal sense, but not deeply interested in thematic development.

The richest parts of Hitch's legacy, I think, are in the pathways he opened up for the ➤



**THE POWER OF PLACE**  
The climactic British Museum chase sequence in 'Blackmail'; above; opposite, Hitchcock 30 years later with Anthony Perkins on the set of 'Psycho'







## The Genius of Hitchcock del Toro on Hitchcock



### WATCH YOUR STEP

Cary Grant, left, descending with Ingrid Bergman and Claude Rains in 'Notorious'; and ascending with the sinister glass of milk in 'Suspicion'



◀ articulation of theme through genre – be it comedy, melodrama or any other – with his advocacy of “pure cinema”. Even now it's hard to evaluate how huge Hitchcock's impact on American genre filmmaking was.

When he first really turned his gaze on America (after an initial attempt in *Saboteur*) in 1943's *Shadow of a Doubt*, he subverted so many things America had previously believed about itself. The film brought an Edward Hopper-esque, *noir* sensibility to bear on the quintessential sleepy small town as idealised in Frank Capra's films and countless studio-era comedies and melodramas. Hitchcock manages to make even the crowded daylight scenes in the film seem menacing, and shows that the supposedly idyllic small town is really an agglomeration of citizens compulsively watching each other. Made at the height of World War II, *Shadow of a Doubt* in many ways marks the death of innocence in American cinematic fiction. This deeply disturbing film prefigures many other great subversive American works, from *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1962) to *Blue Velvet* (1986). It serves as a great overture to the screen adaptations of the disenchanted *noir* of Dashiell Hammett, Raymond Chandler or Patricia Highsmith.

Hitchcock visualised so many everyday acts in ways that have come to define them. It's now almost impossible to shoot a scene in which a character goes up the stairs without thinking of Cary Grant with the glass of milk in *Suspicion* (1941), or Claude Rains coming down the steps while verbally duelling with Grant in *Notorious* (1946), or Martin Balsam climbing to his death in *Psycho* (1960), or Farley Granger entering Robert Walker's home in *Strangers on a Train* (1951)... The list goes on.

I'm 47 years old now, and every day when I go into the shower and turn on the tap, I think of *Psycho*. In the same way, whenever I go into the ocean, I think of *Jaws* (1975). I find Steven Spielberg to be among the most advanced disciples of Hitchcock – especially in his early films such as *Duel* (1971). Spielberg's instinct for rhythm and staging is prodigious; his marriage of technical prowess with narrative flair descends directly from the storyboarding and pre-planning techniques that Hitchcock helped popularise among a new generation of filmmakers.

Then there is Roman Polanski, another master at setting a scene – a virtuoso at both layout and storytelling. He drinks heavily from Hitchcock in *Rosemary's Baby* (1967), and certainly in *Frantic* (1988). You can see John Carpenter learning from Hitch in his early films. I see Hitchcock in David Fincher's masterful *Zodiac* (2007) and *The Game* (1997). I see him in Antonioni's *Blow-Up* (1966), in the cinema of South Korea's Bong Joon-ho, in the vigorous brushstrokes of Pedro Almodóvar's thrillers and in the cold, meta-reflexive brilliance of Michael Haneke. Many of the stylistic quirks Hitchcock either invented or perfected are to be found in every subsequent generation of filmmakers, who reference them consciously, or have absorbed them through homages to the homages. It can be hard to unpick, for his films

have seeped into popular culture, from gallery installations to *The Simpsons*.

### The study of cinema

Another thing that's unique about Hitchcock is the extent to which his legacy is as much in the academic study of cinema as it is in the work of other directors. The whole field of film studies is dominated by Hitchcock's towering examples. The crop-dusting sequence in *North by Northwest* is up there alongside the Odessa Steps sequence in Eisenstein's *Battleship Potemkin* (1925) as one of the most studied sequences in film classes all over the world.

Hitchcock's great gift to the study of cinema was his willingness to verbalise the methods through which he achieved his artistry – most importantly in the Truffaut interview book, which remains a transformative pillar in how we go about articulating cinema. Hitchcock's generosity in talking about his work made him antipodal to many of the two-fisted film masters of the past. He broke away from the stoic silence of such myth-making American directors as John Ford, Howard Hawks, Raoul Walsh and William Wyler, and he elaborated on his processes in a colloquial way that – unlike directors in the Russian school like Pudovkin and Eisenstein – was neither dogmatic nor intimidating.

Hitchcock revelled in talking about how obsessively he would pursue something like the puffing black smoke coming from a train in *Shadow of a Doubt*, or how he went to great lengths to create the correct sheen on a pair of scissors or a knife. He spoke about filmmaking not in terms of pure theory and law, but in parables and maxims, making his knowledge seem accessible and easy to paraphrase: “The better the villain, the better the

**Hitchcock visualised so many everyday acts in ways that have come to define them**





#### SET PIECE

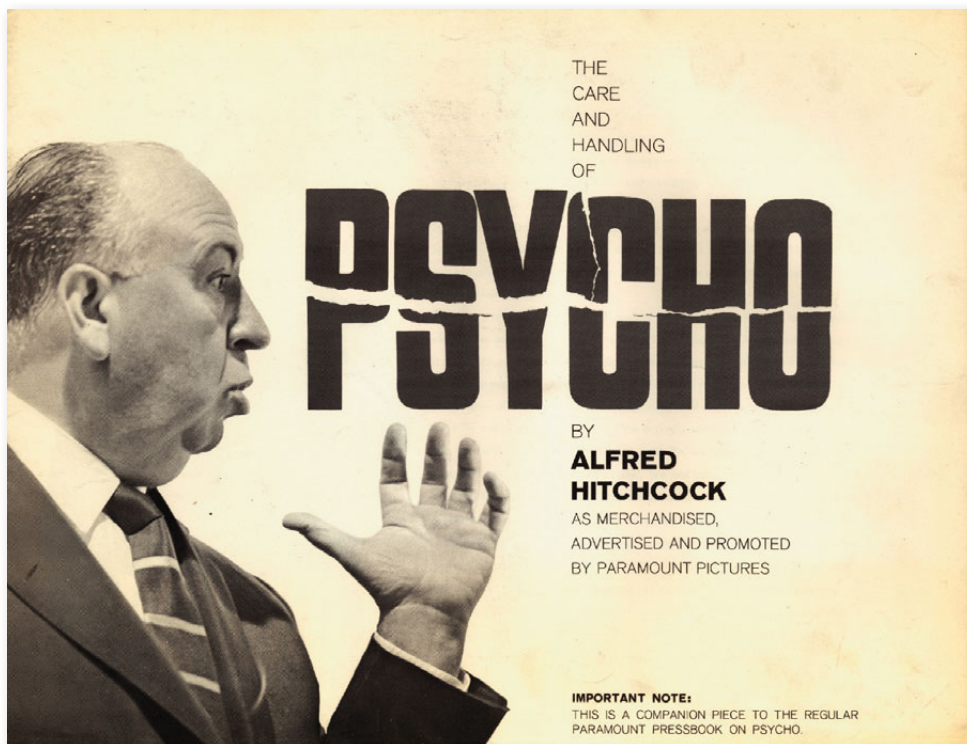
The crop-dusting scene in 'North by Northwest' is one of the most studied in cinema; right, Hitchcock on set in the 1950s; below, promotional material for 'Psycho'



film"; "A lot of directors create slices of life, I create slices of cake"; "Drama is life with the dull parts cut out"; "Repetition with conscience is style"; "Suspense comes from dispensing information to heighten emotion, not by withholding it."

And yet, behind his quotable phrases and TV-friendly persona lived a complex, convulsive poet of the dark side. I have to believe Hitchcock himself designed this elaborate misdirection, the creation of his fastidious persona. His films give us a clue, for he said through his characters that we should distrust 'neat', because being neat speaks of great planning. Neat is an occultation. Hitchcock understood the power of permeating all available media: he published anthologies of suspense stories, then adapted these for radio; he appeared on TV, in his movie trailers, in commercials. For decades, mainstream audiences took pride in being able to identify his famous cameo appearances in his own films. He became, in himself, the most powerful form of advertising for his work.

Before Hitchcock, only movie stars and the occasional ego-driven producer were branded as audience magnets. The name above the title belonged to Selznick or DeMille or Disney. But much like Disney, Hitchcock understood at a crucial point that the branding of his persona – straight into the Middle American home – was both the way to achieve larger success and the means to create a facade that could shield him from further scrutiny. Both Uncle Walt and Hitch maintained creative control of their work by establishing direct lines of communication with their audience. Each looked straight into your eye, unmediated, and promised to deliver exactly the form of entertainment you expected from him. ➡





## The Genius of Hitchcock del Toro on Hitchcock



◀ With the exception of what I call his ‘American Gothic’ masterpieces *Shadow of a Doubt*, *Psycho* and *Vertigo* (1958), among others, Hitchcock’s cinematic vocabulary was fully formed during his English period. Still, it is remarkable to see him expand his technical and narrative traits in his subsequent American films. Hitchcock was a survivor – a master who grew from silent film to sound, and from black-and-white to colour, and who articulated the possibilities of each of these new resources with great glee and optimism. Even if Hitchcock resented the fact that sound brought with it theatrical affectations that set back the purity of cinema, he chose to embrace the change, and expanded the possibilities of sound, which became another ‘pure cinema’ tool through which he could express his thematic concerns.

Hitchcock creates a rhythm between image and dialogue. For me one of the finest examples of this is the final descent of the staircase in *Notorious*, when Sebastian (Claude Rains), his mother (Leopoldine Konstantin), Devlin (Cary Grant) and Alicia (Ingrid Bergman) are all coming down the steps, while the Nazis are waiting in the hallway. Hitchcock punctuates the dialogue with the tension of descending those steps through four or five shots that he repeats rhythmically. It’s one of the least studied sequences in Hitchcock, but I think it’s one of the most difficult sequences to achieve, and it comes out of his understanding that dialogue is not used simply to deliver information or to move the plot along or define character; it is used by him musically.

Another example is in *Frenzy* (1972), where he counter-punctuates the rhythm of the images with Rusk saying “lovely, lovely”, and Brenda, the rape victim, praying and quoting the Bible. It’s

both thematically horrifying and rhythmically cinematic. Or take the opening shot of *North by Northwest*, where Cary Grant is firing off dialogue at the speed of *Sweet Smell of Success*. Coming out of the lift, the camera is following him or leading him, but he is in charge of the rhythm of the shot. Another great example in *North by Northwest* is the first encounter between Grant and James Mason, where the lines are very spare – punctuating two opposing camera moves that show you that these guys are in a duel even if they are in the most civilised of conversations.

### A genre in himself

Hitchcock was an immensely versatile filmmaker – one who was able to give you a gigantic, complex action-comedy-thriller like *North by Northwest* and as deep and disturbing a study as *Shadow of a Doubt*, or as bitter a view of the world as the disillusioned, bile-fed *Frenzy*. And then to throw in a masterpiece of calculated terror such as *The Birds* (1963) or *Psycho*, or one of the best spy melodramas ever made in *Notorious*, and one of the most beautiful stories of doomed Romantic love in *Vertigo*. All so different – so which one of those is Hitchcock? He’s all of them. Over the course of more than 50 films, he became a genre himself.

In spite of the dozens – if not hundreds – of

**Hitchcock embraced and expanded the possibilities of sound, which became another pure cinema tool**



### SYMPATHY FOR THE DEVIL

Charlie (Joseph Cotten, above) with his namesake (Teresa Wright) in ‘*Shadow of a Doubt*’; left, Rusk (Barry Foster) with Brenda (Barbara Leigh-Hunt) in ‘*Frenzy*’

books written about Hitchcock, there’s still much to examine, and fertile ground for study: the way he generated suspense by weaving social reality into his characters’ dynamics; his Hogarthian misanthropy, emerging from the disenchantment of his dark Romanticism; his parallels with both Dickens and Oscar Wilde, and many, many other avenues of study yet to be taken.

I believe, however, that Hitchcock revealed his private self thoroughly through his work. Compulsive filmmakers are like an invisible man standing against a white wall; every time they make a movie, they hand us a balloon full of paint which we throw against them, and as we do, their previously invisible silhouette emerges in full colour. I believe it is possible to come to know a filmmaker – or any artist – more by his or her work than by sharing his daily life. It is through their films that they create a complete biography, where they truly reveal themselves. Their films are the proverbial purloined letter, full of clues, laid right there, in broad daylight, in front of everyone’s eyes.

Just as the famous line drawing of his silhouette (done in eight or nine strokes) became the international symbol for suspense and terror, Hitchcock’s films remain the truest embodiment of his own inner terrors and wonderment – personal visions which he joyfully projected onto us, his audience. Hitchcock’s genius not only changed cinema – it changed the way we look at the world, both within and without.

■ Guillermo del Toro was talking to James Bell; a shorter version of this piece appears in the new BFI Compendium ‘39 Steps to the Genius of Hitchcock’. The BFI season ‘The Genius of Hitchcock’ plays at the BFI Southbank, London until the end of October



# THE HITCHCOCK NINE

*Alfred Hitchcock made ten silent movies, of which all but one survive. Now at last they can be seen again in their full glory. **Bryony Dixon** of the BFI National Archive takes us through the painstaking restoration process*

**A**lfred Hitchcock bestrides the world of film like a colossus. Celebrated for his artistry and loved for his ability to entertain, he represents the perfect synthesis of the artistic and the commercial. It's a nice fit for the BFI, which has always sought to bridge the industry and the art of the film. So who better than Hitchcock to serve as the focus for our contribution to the 2012 Cultural Olympiad?

When asked how the BFI – along with the other national institutions – would mark this occasion, we reached for our great icons. Who were our equivalents of Shakespeare, Dickens or Turner – our 'old masters'? The name Hitchcock was at the top of the list. He is our most famous filmmaker, a director of huge international standing who had

a long career in Britain and resolutely retained his Britishness while working in the US. What's more, he was born in East London, just a couple of tube stops from the new Olympic Stadium. But how to celebrate the man's achievement and bring something new to the audiences of 2012?

Alongside other BFI projects – 'The Genius of Hitchcock' season and the new book *39 Steps to the Genius of Hitchcock* – here was the opportunity to fulfil a long-standing desire on the part of the BFI National Archive to restore Hitchcock's nine surviving silent films. Why these nine in particular? Charles Barr, writing in the above-mentioned

## I'LL BE MOTHER

**The young Alfred Hitchcock (in hat, centre) takes a tea break with the cast and crew on the set of his 1928 film 'The Farmer's Wife', one of his rare comedies**

publication, puts it very succinctly: "From today's perspective, they [the silent films] have a double interest: as harbingers of the great works of Hitchcock's maturity and as eloquent examples, in their own right, of the expressive power of the fully developed silent medium of the 1920s." Although these films have been reasonably visible over the years, available at independent cinemas, film festivals and on home-viewing formats, until now they have never been fully restored.

People will inevitably ask: if the films are available to buy as copies on DVD, why spend all that money restoring them? Film restoration is an expensive business, undertaken only as part of a major project requiring special funding and planning. The investment of public and private monies in the restoration of the artefact is far, far





## The Genius of Hitchcock restoration



➤ greater than its earning capacity even in the cultural (rather than the commercial) sense. So it's a valid question, to which we need an answer.

On closer inspection, the nine silent Hitchcocks were not in such good shape. Apart from the usual wear and tear and deterioration that all film is heir to, some of the films were abridged – a common practice in the silent era; there were different versions, some with sections missing, and prints made from second negatives (of which more below). *Easy Virtue* only survived in a poor 16mm abridged version. A tenth film – 1926's *The Mountain Eagle* – has been lost for decades. There's nothing we can do about that, of course, but as far as the other nine titles were concerned, there was room for considerable improvement.

### Assembling the elements

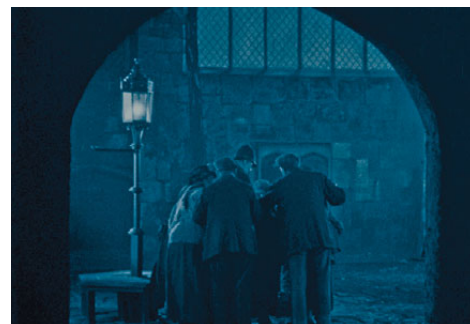
To explain the differences between film remastering (a tidying-up process for producing access materials such as DVD, Blu-ray or even theatrical releases) and full restoration, we first have to get away from the idea that the process is a glorified photoshopping exercise, which simply runs a film through some dust-busting software and fiddles with the contrast. A better analogy for the process might be the restoration of fine-art paintings. If this creates in your mind an image of a specialist conservator dabbing away with a single-haired paintbrush at infinitesimally small specks of paint on a Rembrandt, then that's about right. Film restoration means dealing with the smallest elements of the image – the frame, the film grain, the pixel. It requires skills and knowledge that can only be acquired after years of practice. And a whole new range of skills has to be acquired with digital techniques.

The approach taken for the nine Hitchcock

films – the restoration 'route', as we call it – is based on a combination of digital and traditional film (ie photochemical) methodologies. It has enabled us to make a significant improvement to the image quality and completeness of the films, which will change the way we look at Hitchcock's early work and secure its preservation for years to come. The basic method is this: all the known film elements are assembled – from the BFI's own collection, and the holdings of rights holders, other archives or collectors (this is a difficult process in itself); then the different prints and fragments are compared side by side, frame by frame.

If you consider that a print of *The Ring* (1927) has 132,512 frames, you can get an idea of the amount of work involved in this part of the process. Each shot is listed by its length, image quality and a description of what it contains. This is done for each 'element' (ie each separate print); *The Pleasure Garden* (1926), for example, involved five separate elements, one from the BFI, two US prints from different collections, one from the Netherlands and one from France. The next stage is to transfer the material to digital form by scanning – another process requiring great care and attention, as it will affect the stability and framing of the image and its quality. For *Blackmail* (1929), a combination of dry and wet gate scanning helped get the best quality out of every frame – wet gate

**For the Gainsborough films, no negatives survive at all, so we've worked from original release prints**



### OUT OF THE FOG

Tints enhance the changing moods of 'The Lodger', in which Ivor Novello's protagonist (in bed, left) finds himself wrongly suspected of a string of murders

scanning is good for eliminating surface scratches, but will soften the image slightly; dry gate scanning will render a sharper image, but will copy through any damage to the emulsion on the surface of the film.

The next procedure is to 'conform' the scanned images. Here, a small team makes decisions about which shots from which source should go into the final edit, based on quality of the image and the order in which they should appear. In some cases this requires a choice, as the different sources may have been compiled from different original shots – we found this with two different prints of *Downhill* (1927), in which a montage sequence is made up of different shots of street scenes. Or the prints may have the same shots in a different sequence, or shots missing due to damage or abridgment.

With most restorations you would have a definitive 'edit' for a particular version of a film, and you might be helped by referring to a shooting script, dope sheets, studio records, a censor's viewing notes or even critics' contemporary reviews. For the Hitchcock silents, these simply haven't survived, so decisions have to be made on the basis of forensic examination of splices, dissolves, frame dimensions, edge codes and what we know about the filmmaker's style, as well as industry and individual studio practice.

There's a difference between the films Hitchcock made for Gainsborough (*The Pleasure Garden*, *The Lodger*, *Downhill*, *Easy Virtue*) and the later ones he made at British International Pictures (*The Ring*, *The Farmer's Wife*, *Champagne*, *The Manxman* and *Blackmail*). The former company – less well-off – did not, as far as we can tell, make additional negatives for export versions compiled from alternative camera takes. BIP did, however – resulting, for example, in a French version of





*The Ring* made almost entirely of different takes from the British version (the same camera probably filmed one after the other, as distinct from the American practice of shooting the same take with more than one camera).

For *Champagne* (1928), meanwhile, we only have what we call a 'second negative', which seems to have been compiled from second-best shots, probably as insurance against damage to the negative used for the final release prints. It has some continuity problems, unmade dissolves, clumsy editing and unpolished performances, which just aren't up to Hitchcock's standard for a finished release print. Unfortunately, this negative is all that survives, so it's not surprising that generations of Hitchcock scholars have found the film problematic. For the Gainsborough films, however, no negatives survive at all, so we've worked from original release prints; there's less room to improve quality, but with the trade-off that we have a record of the films' tinting.

After these difficult decisions have been made and the 'conform' (the final restoration edit) is set, the grading, colour work (for the tinted prints), remaking of title cards and digital clean-up commences. For weeks, sometimes months, tiny adjustments are made: dust, scratches and damage are meticulously removed; highlights, blacks and midtones are rigorously balanced; colour tints are added, based on detailed research; titles must be translated from foreign versions; images are reframed and stabilised (but not so much as to remove the 'film look'); and a progression of 'reviews' pick up any faults and alterations that need doing. All of these processes rely on highly skilled staff and long hours of concentrated effort. When the work is finished, the 'deliverables' must be made: preservation negatives and data,

and 35mm exhibition prints and DCPs (Digital Cinema Packages) adjusted for silent running speed to be sent to cinemas.

Then comes the addition of newly commissioned scores, for a silent-film restoration doesn't just involve the artefact of the film print, but also the showing of it. A film must be 'performed' – and a silent film particularly so, as it needs its two components, the image and the music, to make it whole. For these shows we have produced both film and digital formats – indeed, 2012 will go down in history as the year film exhibition went digital. But if the digital future for historical cinema looks alarming to you, it shouldn't. Archivists have been welcoming the digital revolution as a good thing – certainly for film restoration and arguably for film exhibition.

We might take a leaf here out of the book of the unflappable Hitchcock, who used to say, "It's only a movie." So we might say of digital, "It's only another format." At the BFI National Archive, we specialise in formats – it's what we do. Where once a restoration by the archive might reach a few hundred people in projections at festivals and cinematheques, we can now reach tens or even hundreds of thousands on a variety of platforms. In terms of cultural value, restoration is more justifiable than at any time in the past.

## Revelations

So, after all of this work, have we been able to learn any more about Hitchcock's early films? Have we made enough difference to make the restoration process worthwhile? From a personal perspective, sitting through many of these sessions has left me with a profound appreciation of Hitchcock's clever filmmaking style. If there's something about one of these film I don't like, it'll



## DOWNWARD SPIRAL

'The Pleasure Garden', Hitchcock's first feature as director, follows the varying romantic fortunes of two London chorus girls, including Patsy (Virginia Valli, left)

be to do with the subject matter or production values – never a result of the structure or editing.

The addition of shots into *The Pleasure Garden* has transformed the film's pacing, while also introducing us to Hitchcock's subtle use of symbolism – even in his first film – to add depth to the melodramatic story. The sheer quality of the image on the restored version of *Blackmail* – a film I didn't think could be improved, as it had always looked fine – is a revelation. The gorgeous locations and intimate performances in *The Farmer's Wife* (1928) and *The Ring* are all considerably enhanced by the restoration, as they have been for *The Manxman* (1929), which is a miracle of grading, matching images from three different sources, all with their different textures and density. *The Lodger* (1926), the only print to have undergone restoration work previously, has benefited from new techniques, so that combinations of tinting and toning give a better rendition of lamp-light in the foggy London night. The addition of the tints, the new intertitles with their painstakingly recreated fonts and – in particular – the careful grading all add up to a very significant improvement that generations of viewers will be able to appreciate.

After living in Hitchcock's head for the past three years, the restoration team has certainly been inspired to do the old boy proud. For our greatest film icon, how could we do otherwise?

■ The restoration was supervised by Kieron Webb, BFI National Archive. The restored print of 'The Ring' screens at Hackney Empire, London, on 13 July, with a new score by Soweto Kinch; 'The Lodger' screens at Barbican Hall on 21 July, with a new score by Nitin Sawhney. Other titles will be screened later in the year



# THE FIRST NINE STEPS

*Like John Ford, Howard Hawks and other great directors of the golden age, Alfred Hitchcock developed his cinematic language directing silent films, which show many of the hallmarks of his later sound classics*



**The Pleasure Garden (1926)**

Hitchcock's debut follows a showgirl (Virginia Valli, above) who marries a sleazy man (Miles Mander). It anticipates many Hitchcockian themes and stylistic tropes, including voyeurism.



**The Lodger (1926)**

Ivor Novello (above) plays the first of Hitchcock's 'wrong men' in the director's London-set breakthrough, about the hunt for a Jack the Ripper-style killer who preys on young blondes.



**Downhill (1927)**

In an early example of the 'transference of guilt' theme in Hitchcock, Ivor Novello (left) stars as a public schoolboy who is expelled after taking the blame for a friend's indiscretion.



**Easy Virtue (1927)**

Hitchcock adapted Noël Coward's play about a divorcee who hides her scandalous past from her wealthy new lover, only to have her secrets uncovered by his jealous, domineering mother.



**The Ring (1927)**

Set in the East End London of Hitchcock's youth, *The Ring* stars Carl Brisson (above) as boxer 'One Round' Jack Sander, fighting to keep the heart of Lillian Hall Davis's Nellie from his rival Bob.



**The Farmer's Wife (1928)**

Hitchcock's charming silent comedy concerns an obstinate widowed farmer who finds himself alone after his daughter gets married, and sets out to find a suitable new bride for himself.



**Champagne (1928)**

This light and breezy Paris-set film is a vehicle for popular comedienne Betty Balfour (right), who plays a spoilt little rich girl whose father cuts off her funds to teach her a lesson.



**The Manxman (1929)**

Anticipating such later Hitchcock love-triangle films as *Notorious*, this melodrama set on the Isle of Man stars Czech actress Anny Ondra (right) as a woman torn between her husband and a lover.



**Blackmail (1929)**

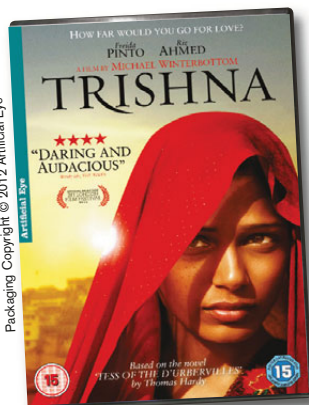
Anny Ondra (right) stars again in Hitch's final silent film, which was also recut in a pioneering sound version. But many critics now rank the silent version as the greater achievement.



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# Reviews

50 FILM OF THE MONTH

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Reviews, synopses and credits  
for all the month's new films, plus  
the pick of the new books and DVDs

.....  
Like all Seth MacFarlane's work, **Ted** is  
untrammelled by any trace of sophistication  
– it relies on the comic potential of random  
squibs of pop culture, all-in-good-fun  
offensiveness and dirty puppet humour **p77**  
.....



# Domestic service

Ann Hui's touching 'A Simple Life' marks a change of pace for Hong Kong action star Andy Lau, but it's veteran actress Deanie Ip who really shines in this beautifully observed tale of an aged family retainer. By **Roger Clarke**

## A Simple Life

Ann Hui, 2011

Hong Kong director Ann Hui has long been one of the most unjustly neglected of all contemporary filmmakers. But her latest film *A Simple Life* (*Tao jie*) has been showered with awards and, as far as the UK goes, ends a long absence from our screens – not even her admirable *Summer Snow* (*Nuren sishi*, 1995) received distribution here. Hui's films typically tackle social issues, though she was once quite capable (albeit reluctantly, one feels) of making genre films such as *Love in a Fallen City* (*Qingchengzhi lian*, 1984), a nostalgic love story set in World War II, or the Andy Lau Tokyo-underworld thriller *Zodiac Killers* (*Ji dao zhui zong*, 1991). Hui enjoyed early success in the late 1970s with her 'Vietnam trilogy', which culminated with *Boat People* (*Touben nuhai*, 1982), a landmark in the history of the Hong Kong New Wave with its story of a Japanese journalist and the plight of Vietnamese refugees.

These days, however, the 65-year-old director is best known for low-key dramas about women's lives, especially those dealing with themes of marginalisation and ageing, such as *The Postmodern Life of my Aunt* (*Yi ma de hou xian dai sheng huo*, 2006), the last of her films on which she received a writing credit. Class isn't really a great theme of Hong Kong cinema, but Hui is well aware – more aware than most – of its nuances. While she doesn't strictly-speaking regard herself as a feminist, formally there's always at least a hint of identification with the outsider in her films, perhaps partly due to her dual Manchurian/Japanese heritage. In recent years Hui has been concentrating on family dramas including *The Way We Were* (*Tin shui wai dik yat yu ye*, 2008), but by all accounts she was on the verge of giving up filmmaking altogether when this project was put together by producer Roger Lee, who co-wrote the script with Susan Chan.

Based on Lee's own experiences, *A Simple Life* is about a Hong Kong



**Food is everywhere in this film. One of the chief horrors of the care home is the bad food. When Roger visits Tao, it's often to take her out to cafés**

producer called Roger (Andy Lau, reunited with Hui 20 years after *Zodiac Killers*), who is looked after by ageing family retainer Ah Tao (Deanie Ip). But then, after years of dedication to Roger's Hong Kong upper-middle-class family, Tao suffers a stroke and is forced to retire to a care home. The main story follows Roger's efforts to cope without her – he is a single man, most of whose family have emigrated to the US. Anxious about Roger's inability to look after himself, Tao sets her mind to finding a replacement maid – though, as if in a Hong Kong episode of *Upstairs, Downstairs*, no one comes up to her high standards. The surrogacy of their

'mother-son' relationship, along with themes of isolation and co-dependency, is at the heart of this film. Despite Roger's implicit success in making movies, they are both in their different ways out of step with the modern world.

The film opens with a comic scene as Tao walks through the morning market, giving the grocers and fishmongers a gentle hectoring over the quality and price of the food. But this isn't at all where the movie is going emotionally – it's simply an establishing scene, showing us a local character, fixed in her habits, old-fashioned and fussy, whom everyone has known for years. Tao is a woman who embodies loyalty and thrift, and the



scene where Roger returns home – the wordless way in which she serves him an astounding meal of crab and fish (lavish, despite her thrift) – conjures a sense of perfect domestic contentment. At first sight this seems a highly conventional set-up, but in reality their odd-couple relationship is quite odd: there's little trace of the modern world in the flat – there seems to be no internet, no TV; the sense of stasis, of being pickled in time, is profound.

Hui is never vulgar enough to show us Tao's actual illness – the fall to the ground, the long, desperate wait for help. A shot of Roger, after he has called an ambulance, mopping the kitchen floor – cleaning up the liquid deliquescence of sickness – has a subdued horror to it that's very moving. Yet the expected hot breath of sentiment, though always imminent, is mostly kept at bay by deft direction. Yes, there's the standard-issue Hong Kong sad music, the slowing down and freeze on Tao's face that suggests that the final stroke (and final freeze) will visit her soon. But there's also a briskly detailed, cynical visit by a professional singer to the care home during the autumnal moon festival; the singer grimaces when no one is looking, and the moon cakes are snatched from the old people after photographs are taken, for re-use in the next care home.

Until she won the Best Actress award at Venice last year for this role, Deanie Ip was little known outside her native Hong Kong and Taiwan, but in those territories she's a popular character actor with a long career in local movies and TV soaps. Indeed she's been a mother to Andy Lau several times on screen: in *The Emissary* for Hong Kong TV in 1982, in the courtroom dramas *The Unwritten Law* (1985, in which Lau's barrister defends Ip's prostitute – before discovering she is his mother halfway through the trial) and *The Truth* (1988), and in the action/romance *Prince Charming* (1999). In other words, she's been mothering this star for 30 years; they're a Hong Kong institution, endlessly examined, with her the eternal matriarch and him the successful son.





#### TIES THAT BIND

Confined to a nursing home, Ah Tao (Deanie Ip, all pics), long-serving family housekeeper of film producer Roger (Andy Lau, right), still worries about who's caring for her former employer

Since *A Simple Life* focuses so dynamically on Ip's acting and the failings of the body in old age, it hasn't been much remarked that this is also a wonderful film about food. There's none of the flashy food porn you'd get in an Ang Lee film such as *Eat Drink Man Woman* (1994), but as a quiet examination of the central role of food in domestic Cantonese culture, this is about as good as it gets. Take the central role of the poached ox tongue: Tao indulges Roger when he asks for it, and despite a brief hectoring about it being bad for his health, duly goes out and buys the huge and ugly piece of meat. The scene of the stroke opens with the most exacting direction, almost reminiscent of the way domestic routine goes awry in Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 Quai de Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975). Hui fixes the camera on the wok as Tao prepares the poaching of the meat, carefully adding water, spice and scallions; there's a great sense of detail here. Later, with Tao forever removed from this domestic

scene, Roger pulls out this very dish from the freezer, where it has been carefully saved, and sits down to eat it with his old school friends.

Food is everywhere in this film. One of the chief horrors of the care home is the bad food; but when Roger's mother, visiting the US, brings Tao some expensive bird's-nest soup, she's fussy about that too, declaring it too fishy. When Roger visits Tao, it's often to take her out to cafés; in a late scene, with her in a wheelchair, they're out looking for roast-goose noodles. And when Tao interviews girls to replace her as Roger's housekeeper, she wants to know where they would buy fresh fish, or whether they use a clay pot to make rice, rather than a modern electric cooker; most of the candidates look at her with incomprehension or contempt.

*A Simple Life* is shot in a palette of muted autumnal colours, and apart from the odd infelicity – physiotherapy montages, freeze-frames and sentimental string-quartet music, all betraying its Hong Kong roots – it's a very skilful and soulful piece of work. Venice was right to name Ip Best Actress – her performance here is one of the best by any actress in 2011, Hollywood included.

For credits and synopsis, see page 73

## A sense of honour

*Ann Hui on the social background to her film 'A Simple Life'*

'A Simple Life' is based on the experience of Roger Lee, the producer of the film. He came to me with the story and I liked it very much, so we proceeded to find finance for it. The film documents the daily life of our protagonist Ah Tao (played by Deanie Ip). She has been an orphan since she was a teenager, and has worked as a domestic helper for the same family for four generations. Roger (played by Hong Kong heartthrob Andy Lau) is the only member of the family who is still living in Hong Kong; the rest of the family have emigrated abroad. The two have developed a special bond, more like godmother/godson than a master/servant relationship.

In Chinese society, maids like Tao lived with their masters' families, and would have to arrange with their masters if they needed to take any time off, which usually meant an unusual occasion, like a birth or death in their own families. Of course, not all masters were respectable, but the true story of Roger and Tao proves to the world that honourable traditions from the past sometimes remain, and traces of old values still ignite the stone-cold hearts of people nowadays.



ANN HUI

I watched quite a batch of old-age films as a reference for 'A Simple Life'. They are all very good but not really about old age as such: for instance [the 2009 Finnish film] 'Letters to Father Jacob' is about a dying old priest, but the theme is god and salvation. I also watched 'Apart Together' [2010] a Chinese film about family loyalties.



# Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter

USA 2012

Director: Timur Bekmambetov

Certificate 15 105m 0s

Having scored a publishing success with *Pride and Prejudice and Zombies*, author-screenwriter-producer Seth Grahame-Smith continued his brand of search-and-replace historical horror with the novel *Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter*. An exercise in the fantasy subgenre of 'secret history', this posits the involvement of vampires in the whole history of the United States but hamstrings itself by defaulting to Lincoln biography with tipped-in vampire fights. It's a concept that doesn't really need to go further than the title or cover/poster image, but gets drawn out to foolish ends in the telling and, now that it's turned up as a film, retelling.

Director Timur Bekmambetov was much more fortunate in his source material with the Russian *Night Watch/Day Watch* films (which also find vampires and other creatures of the night covertly involved in the course of human history) and the comic-book adaptation *Wanted* (whose fight-on-a-train-on-a-collapsing-bridge finale is reprised here). Though 3D and CGI impose a blurry, unappealing look on the film, the action sequences are at least daringly conceived. A fight/chase among and on stampeding horses is a standout, but the film also runs to plenty of stop-and-go-mo confrontations in the manner of *Blade* or *Buffy* in which the future president strides through hordes of undercharacterised enemies with his signature axe. Hero Benjamin Walker undergoes the progression from rangy, credible young Mr Lincoln – letting Mary Elizabeth Winstead's Mary Todd stand on his hat to attempt to kiss him – into waxwork beard-and-hat figure, and the film stumbles not on its wilder monster-movie aspects but on its inability to approximate the biopic sections of the narrative without bathos.

Of course, there's a laugh line in the coda, as Mary calls out to Abe to hurry up or he'll miss the theatre, but the movie falls into old-style Hollywood hamfistedness long before that, with clunker lines such as, "This first day of Gettysburg has been a disaster." Frankly, given even the remotest notion of 19th-century history, it's easier to take seriously Abraham Lincoln Vampire Hunter than Abraham Lincoln President with a Black Best Friend. Considering that the one fresh idea in Grahame-Smith's novel is the alignment of the pro-slavery South with a cadre of vampires who want openly to assume their position of dominance over regular humans in a country where there is a legal precedent for the subjugation of one race by another, the film is very timid about this premise. "There's something not right here," one of Abe's sidekicks says, peeping through the windows into a Southern mansion where



The united stakes of America: Benjamin Walker, Dominic Cooper

white owners are dancing with slaves: a moment that should linger longer before an arch Rufus Sewell announces that dinner is served and sets his CGI-mawed guests on the human livestock.

The film adds a few new wrinkles not found in the book – the notion that vampires can't kill each other, the drive to supply silver vampire-killing munitions to the troops at Gettysburg, vampires' ability to become briefly invisible while in attack mode, the vampires' splatters of black blood – and Bekmambetov cuts to a fight scene or training montage

whenever things threaten to get too stuffy or educational, though he is obliged to include a few speeches. As writers from John Polidori to Stephenie Meyer have noted, vampires are a useful metaphor for all manner of human ills, but there's a missed connection here. Slavery was quite bad enough – indeed, worse than it's depicted here – when it was an economic rather than supernatural phenomenon, and giving slavers fangs and dark glasses tends to excuse rather than underline a real historical human evil. ➡ **Kim Newman**

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Tim Burton  
Timur Bekmambetov  
Jim Lemley  
**Screenplay**  
Seth Grahame-Smith  
Based on his novel  
**Director of Photography**  
Caleb Deschanel  
**Editor**  
William Hoy  
**Production Designer**  
François Audouy  
**Music**  
Henry Jackman  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Paul Ledford  
**Costume Designers**  
Carlo Poggioli  
Varya Avdyushko  
**Visual Effects & Digital Animation**  
Method Studios  
**Visual Effects Created by**  
Weta Digital Ltd.

**Visual Effects by**  
CGF  
Soho VFX  
Spin VFX  
**Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Mic Rodgers

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**Production Companies**  
A Twentieth Century Fox presentation  
In association with Dune Entertainment  
A Burton/

Bekmambetov/Lemley production  
A Timur Bekmambetov film  
**Executive Producers**  
Michele Wolkoff  
John J. Kelly  
Simon Kinberg  
Seth Grahame-Smith

## CAST

**Benjamin Walker**  
Abraham Lincoln  
**Dominic Cooper**  
Henry Sturges  
**Anthony Mackie**  
Will Johnson  
**Mary Elizabeth Winstead**  
Mary Todd Lincoln  
**Rufus Sewell**  
Adam  
**Marton Csokas**  
Jack Barts  
**Jimmi Simpson**  
Joshua Speed  
**Joseph Mawle**  
Thomas Lincoln

**Robin McLeavy**  
Nancy Lincoln  
**Erin Wasson**  
Vadoma  
**John Rothman**  
Jefferson Davis  
**Cameron M. Brown**  
Willie Lincoln

**Dolby Digital/ Datasat/SDDS**  
**In Colour**  
**Prints by DeLuxe**  
[2.35:1]

Some screenings presented in 3D

**Distributor**  
20th Century Fox International (UK)

9,450 ft +0 frames

# The Brooklyn Brothers Beat the Best

USA 2011

Director: Ryan O'Nan

Certificate 15 97m 53s

Opening with its lead, Alex, sitting in a New York toilet cubicle mourning over a Dear John letter, *The Brooklyn Brothers Beats the Best* does everything it can to pitch him down towards his lowest ebb in solid cinematic tradition. Alex leaves the cubicle to get on stage and play a gig and in short order loses his band, his day job and his part-time job to go with the lost girlfriend. It's a surprise the screenplay doesn't have him evicted from his apartment to boot, all the better to set him off on a quixotic cross-country tour with someone he's only just met to compete in a Battle of the Bands contest in LA. (You'd do the same.)

With its road-trip structure, cast of eccentrics and themes of dreams versus reality, *The Brooklyn Brothers Beats the Best* is something like *Little Miss Sunshine* (2006) reworked for indie-pop fans. There's a foul-mouthed grandpa and – although Alex and his new collaborator Jim aren't seven-year-old girls but fully grown adults complete with facial hair – there's something of the man-child about both. And like *Little Miss Sunshine*, this aims, in the end, to be an anti-fairytale: Alex and Jim don't arrive at their beauty pageant and win an unlikely victory any more than Abigail Breslin's character does. But despite this there are plenty of points where disbelief is rather hard to suspend. No doubt some bands can work up a fully arranged set of songs from scratch in just four hours. And possibly some could do this on a four-hour drive. Whether anyone could do so while one of them is *driving the car* is another question.

It would be easier to overlook all of this if the music weren't so integral to the film: Ryan O'Nan, not content with writing, directing and playing the lead, also wrote the songs, of which a good half dozen are played in full, pushing *The Brooklyn Brothers* close to being an inadvertent musical (minus the spontaneous crowd choreography). This in turn puts quite a burden on the songs, the general reaction to Alex and Jim's insipid acoustic indie-pop often stretching credulity.

There's a persistent sense of triangulation too, as if O'Nan has set out to remake *Flight of the Conchords* as a Judd Apatow protégé might have approached it. At the same time it's easy to imagine that, made a few years ago, *The Brooklyn Brothers* (which at one point has its hero punching a handicapped child) would have leant more towards the gross-out male-bonding comedies of the time.

Michael Weston (previously seen in minor roles in *Garden State* and *Six Feet Under*) has excellent comic timing as Jim. And there are very funny moments, but not quite enough. One confessional scene in which Alex describes his upbringing by his strict Christian older brother has a (possibly

**SYNOPSIS** America, the 19th century. As a child, Abraham Lincoln tries to save his black best friend Will Johnson from slaver vampire Jack Barts, who takes revenge by killing Lincoln's mother.

As a young man, Lincoln searches for Barts but is nearly killed in a fight with him, saved only by the intervention of dissident vampire Henry Sturges. Under the rule of 5,000-year-old Adam, most American vampires support slavery as a means of easily procuring blood. Because vampires can't kill one another, Henry trains Lincoln, whose favoured weapon is a log-splitting axe, in the art of vampire hunting and sends him to kill Adam's supporters. After avenging his mother by killing Barts and saving Will from a household of vampires, Lincoln breaks with Henry and resolves to tackle the vampire problem by fighting the institution of slavery. While rising to the presidency, he marries Mary Todd and starts a family. When the Civil War begins, Adam pledges vampires to fight for the Confederacy and sends his sister Vadoma to kill Lincoln's young son Willie. Lincoln gathers all the silver in Washington to be made into vampire-killing munitions and has it sent to the troops at Gettysburg via underground train. With Will and Henry, Lincoln fights Adam on a decoy train, besting and killing the arch-vampire. The underground railway gets the silver to the battle. The defeated vampires flee. Lincoln refuses Henry's offer to make him a vampire.

In the present, Henry meets a potential new vampire hunter.



autobiographical) heft and specificity that put it several notches above the more cartoonily detailing elsewhere. But ultimately O'Nan's film aims too often for heartwarming and not enough for honesty. **❖ Sam Davies**

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Jason Michael Berman  
Kwesi Collison  
**Written by**  
Ryan O'Nan  
**Director of Photography**  
Gavin J. Kelly  
**Edited by**  
Annette Davey  
**Production Designer**  
Ola Maslik  
**Original Score**  
Rob Simonsen  
**Sound Mixer**  
Carrie Sheldon  
**Costume Designer**  
Derek Sullivan

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**Production Companies**  
Soaring Flight  
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TideRock Films,  
Character Brigade and  
Taggart Productions  
presents a film by  
Ryan O'Nan  
**Executive Producers**  
Ruth Mutch  
Sergio Agüero  
Sandra R. Berman  
Thomas B. Fore  
Mark G. Mathis

## CAST

Ryan O'Nan  
Alex  
Michael Weston  
Jim  
Arielle Kebbel  
Cassidy  
Melissa Leo  
Sarah  
Andrew McCarthy  
Brian  
Christopher McDonald  
Jack  
Jason Ritter  
Kyle  
Wilmer Valderrama  
Jamón

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Signature  
Entertainment

**8809 ft +8 frames**

**SYNOPSIS** New York, the present. Singer-songwriter Alex has just been dumped by his girlfriend and, after a disastrous gig, is also dropped by his musical partner. The next day he's fired from his day job after arguing with a colleague. Then, at an agency gig at a school for the mentally handicapped, he punches a student he believes is attacking him. Fired again, he's accosted by Jim – another musician recently kicked out of his own band – who saw Alex at the previous night's gig. Jim insists that they form a duo and set out cross-country to a Battle of the Bands contest in Los Angeles, playing the dates he had already booked for his previous group along the way. Alex reluctantly agrees.

They win over the audience at their first gig and also the promoter, Cassidy, who insists on joining them as their tour manager, despite Alex's objections to her presence. After playing at an eccentric frat house in the South, Alex and Cassidy sleep together. The next morning Cassidy disappears with the group's money. Deciding to give up music, Alex travels to San Diego to stay with Brian, his fundamentalist Christian older brother, but they fall out over Brian's treatment of his son. Cassidy arrives, telling Alex that Jim's grandfather has died and that he has gone to LA to play the Battle of the Bands alone in tribute. Alex rushes to LA and with Jim plays an impromptu set for the fans waiting outside the venue for bigger acts. Alex reconciles himself to his lack of success, and also reconciles with Cassidy.

# The Chernobyl Diaries

USA 2012

Director: Brad Parker

Certificate 15 87m 55s

Somewhere between low-budget *vérité* horror' and faux-found-footage thriller, *The Chernobyl Diaries* is very much a producer's movie – a 'film de Oren Peli'. Although it's directed – ably enough for a debut – by computer-graphics whiz Brad Parker, its style, tone and execution clearly derive from writer-producer Peli, the Israeli-American brains behind the highly successful *Paranormal Activity* films.

In *The Chernobyl Diaries*, Peli's basic idea follows the genius of its setting: the abandoned Ukrainian town of Pripyat, near the radioactive site of the Chernobyl nuclear reactor. Peli apparently found his inspiration in film and photographs of the area's eerie buildings and infrastructure, as well as reports of a resurgence in local wildlife – lynx, wolves, boars, wild horses and elks – in the 18-mile exclusion zone surrounding it. (The creepy atmospherics of the place have been well explored by directors in recent years.) 'Extreme tours' of the area – like the one the film's four American protagonists sign up for – are, extraordinarily, genuinely available.

The filmmakers' exploitation of the setting, it must be said, is quite impressive – the more so since they recreated it, crumbling May Day Ferris wheel, Lenin Square and all, in abandoned tractor factories and disused air bases in Serbia and Hungary. The threatening wild animals were evidently more difficult to reproduce in faux *vérité* style, and the native wild dog/wolf hybrids are represented by much tamer-looking guard dogs with temporarily matted hair.

Parker effectively establishes a general atmosphere of threat – and gentle xenophobia – early on, truncating the opening handheld scenes depicting the jolly American foursome doing the town with an unexpected attack by a murderous group of drunken thugs. His delineation of character is less proficient, however. Paul is the gung-ho one, his brother Chris the cautious one, while the girls are differentiated by their hair colour: dark-haired Amanda

is wise, blonde-haired Natalie merely loyal to fiancée Chris. They are joined in their foolhardy jaunt into jeopardy by Norwegian blonde Zoe (who hardly says a word) and Australian Michael (whose hair is mini-ponytailed with a rubber band: clearly no man for a crisis).

The actors are encouraged to improvise but their dialogue rarely rises above a little early bickering ("You pussy!"), some later mutual recrimination ("Someone has to know we are out here!") and primal fear ("They got him!"). In this film, the characters are all mere victims, for whom little empathy can be felt, and Dimitri Diatchenko, as tour guide Uri, is the only actor worth a mention.

Visually, the film is more diverting, the night shots better than those in day, underground better than over. Morten Søborg, Nicolas Winding Refn's sometime cinematographer, expertly deploys his handheld camera, judiciously blurring the images of the possibly mutant assailants. But the presiding spirit is Peli's. Overall his film fails to deliver genuine shocks, lacking both sufficient inventiveness and, more crucially, the courage of its exploitative, paranoid convictions. -

❖ Wally Hammond

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Oren Peli  
Brian Witten  
**Screenplay**  
Oren Peli  
Carey Van Dyke  
Shane Van Dyke  
**Story**  
Oren Peli  
**Director of Photography**  
Morten Søborg  
**Editor**  
Stan Salfas  
**Production Designer**  
Aleksandar Denic  
**Music**  
Diego Stocco  
**Sound Mixer**  
Ray Beckett  
**Costume Designer**  
Miomirka Bailovic  
**Visual Effects**  
Dive  
Shade VFX  
Bot VFX, LLC  
**Key Stunt Co-ordinator**  
Bela Ungler

©Oxford Tours, LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Alcon Entertainment  
and FilmNation  
Entertainment present  
in association with PWP  
a PWP production

**Executive Producers**  
Rob Cowan  
Richard Sharkey  
Broderick Johnson  
Andrew A. Kosove  
Allison Silver  
Milan Popelka  
Alison Cohen

## CAST

Ingrid Bolso Berdal  
Zoe  
Dimitri Diatchenko  
Uri  
Olivia Taylor Dudley  
Natalie  
Devin Kelley  
Amanda  
Jesse McCartney  
Chris  
Nathan Phillips  
Michael  
Jonathan Sadowski  
Paul  
Milos Timotijevic  
Russian check  
point guard  
Milutin Milosevic  
Ivan Djordjevic

**Dolby Digital/DTS**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited

**7,912 ft +8 frames**

# Comes a Bright Day

United Kingdom 2012

Director: Simon Aboud

Uncertain from the off whether it wants to be a whimsical coming-of-age romance or a gloomy study of human behaviour *in extremis*, Simon Aboud's feature debut certainly limits its options when it strands all its characters in one room as victims of a slapdash hostage situation. Craig Roberts plays dreamy youth Sam Smith, who works in a hotel but harbours hopes of success in the restaurant business. Running an errand for his shady boss Mr Morgan, Sam visits a high-end antique jewellery store and is promptly taken hostage as part of a messy sort of robbery bid. Kept prisoner together, Sam, the jeweller Charlie and Charlie's young assistant Mary have an opportunity to get to know each other while the robbers, a bungling pair named Cameron and Clegg, ponder their next move.

*Comes a Bright Day* is a chamber piece, heavily dialogue-based and containing almost no exterior shots. Such a confined setting demands crackly tension if it's to have impact, so it's unfortunate that Aboud's characters don't quite have the force required. Roberts reprises the moony slump of his performance in *Submarine* (2010), bringing such scant enunciation to his many lines that a good third of them are wasted on the wind (though his large, serious eyes are a good deal more expressive). Imogen Poots, as Mary, takes the opposite approach, reacting to everything like mad and issuing her lines with the quivering intensity of a schoolgirl Ophelia. This mismatch in the rhythms of the lead performances reflects the film's general oddness of tone. The murder early on in the heist of an elderly female hostage is clearly intended to raise the stakes, and to convince us that Cameron and Clegg are more dangerous than the easy gag of their names suggests, but Aboud's script never follows through on this implied jeopardy. More inclined towards quiet conversations than action, and with very little of note revealed by those quiet conversations, it promptly powers down again, making for an extraordinarily sedate heist movie.

Script and setting alike, meanwhile, have a timeless quality: heart-of-gold criminals, whimsical jewel dealers and cocky young people on the make conspire to create a sort of composite movie London, with elements of Ealing and the British New Wave but not much connection to its actual present-day setting. When the environment feels so constructed, it's hard to summon any tension on behalf of the characters. (Sloppy writing doesn't help: when dialogue is more or less all you have, allowing a character to misuse "literally" twice in one showpiece monologue is a bad slip.)

The film's peculiar sense of time, combined with its wayward pacing, swoonily romantic music and low-impact plot, makes for a warm, haphazard atmosphere that isn't without charm. Aboud's film is worlds away

**SYNOPSIS** Kiev, the present. Twentysomething American Paul is visited by his brother Chris, Chris's girlfriend Natalie and her friend Amanda, en route to Moscow. Chris tells them of his encounter with 'extreme tour guide' Uri and suggests a trip to Pripyat, a ghost town abandoned in 1986 following the nuclear disaster at nearby Chernobyl. With Uri as their guide, the four set out on the trip, accompanied by Australian Michael and Zoe, a Norwegian. Arriving at the security fence outside Pripyat they are turned back by armed guards, but Uri takes them in via a secret entrance. They tour the apartment blocks near the town square. Uri sees traces of a fire suggesting recent human occupation, but hides this fact from the others. When a bear suddenly charges through the corridor, they retreat to Uri's jeep – only to find that the high-tension leads have been removed.

As night falls, Uri and Chris go to investigate strange noises; only Chris returns, his leg ripped by prowling dogs. Dogs attack the vehicle. Next morning, Chris and Natalie remain in the truck as the others go in search of Uri; they find his body in pieces. They are chased by zombie-like creatures but escape with Uri's torch and gun. Natalie's video camera reveals that Chris has been killed by the creatures. Natalie, Michael and Zoe are also devoured. Paul and Amanda survive, but are confronted by military personnel who shoot Paul and hand Amanda over to doctors. She is incarcerated in a prison cell and left to the mercy of the creatures.



from grittier, trendier depictions of youth and crime in London, on its own genteel, faintly fantastical planet. On the occasions that it works its oddness well, it feels intelligently strange rather than merely chaotic. It's just a shame there are so many longeurs and uncertain moments in between. **♥♥ Hannah McGill**

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Christine Alderson  
**Written by**  
Simon Aboud  
**Director of Photography**  
John Lynch  
**Film Editors**  
Mark Day  
Gavin Buckley  
**Production Designer**  
Ricky Eyres  
**Composers**  
Joel Cadbury  
Melissa Parmenter  
**Sound Recorder**  
Tarn Willers  
**Costume Designer**  
Ian Fulcher

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**Production Companies**  
Intandem Films & Matador Pictures  
present in association  
Cinema Six & Regent  
Capital a Smudge  
Films, Lost Tribe  
Productions & Ipso  
Facto Films production  
A film by Simon Aboud  
**Executive Producers**  
Nigel Thomas  
Charlotte Walls  
Hugh Spurling  
Boo Simonian  
Sabrina Guinness

## CAST

**Craig Roberts**  
Sam Smith  
**Imogen Poots**  
Mary Bright  
**Kevin McKidd**  
Cameron  
**Timothy Spall**  
Charlie Morgan  
**Geoff Bell**  
Mr Morgan  
**Josef Altin**  
Clegg  
**Ben Cura**  
Mr Sullivan  
**Sibéal McGuinne**  
Mrs Lieberman  
**Anthony Welsh**  
Elliot

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

# Detachment

USA 2011

Director: Tony Kaye

Certificate 15 97m 43s

Once a commercial director infamous for his Kubrickian self-image, Tony Kaye has become an equally notorious maker of features. In his 1998 debut *American History X*, about neo-Nazi youth, and *Lake of Fire*, his 2006 self-financed documentary about abortion in the US, Kaye has retained an adman's spirit – both in his choice of newsworthy, issue-based material and in the flamboyant, any-means-necessary filmic language he uses to engage his audience in debate.

Scripted by former teacher Carl Lund, *Detachment* has an unequivocal polemic to drive home: that the US public-education system is fatally damaged, and the whole of American society is to blame, from misguided students, defeatist teachers and selfish parents up to corrupt government, ideological vacancy and the media mechanisms that sap people's ability to think for themselves.

The only hope, *Detachment* suggests, comes from youths of promise – although the system is stacked against them – and from the rare insightful, committed adult, whose efforts are similarly likely to be doomed. Here substitute teacher Henry Barthes comes into schools for short periods, does what little he can to help, then passes on. He's unable to engage himself fully in his pupils' lives, partly because of the nature of his job, partly because of his psychic flaw: he can empathise, he can help, but his emotional self-defence, the detachment of the title, means that in the end he can only look on ruefully.

The latest incarnation of cinema's perennial redeeming mentor, as seen in films from *Boys Town* (1938) through *The Blackboard Jungle* (1955) to *Dangerous Minds* (1995), Henry not only has deep resources of calm and courage but understands his pupils' pain ("I know what it means to be angry," he tells one combative youth on first meeting). But his efforts can't come to much in a world depicted as hell on earth. The school's teachers have all caved in under a range of pressures, not least bureaucratic: an official gives a cynical pep talk in which the true agenda is quickly revealed as real-estate value. Pupils' heads are full of aimless rage, while irresponsible parents berate teachers for not doing their nurturing work for them. Meanwhile, teachers face personal calvaries in homes shot to resemble claustrophobic caves: Mr Wiatt faces an indifferent, screen-addicted family, Principal Dearden a sneering, macho husband. No wonder they behave unpredictably at work – like Lucy Liu's counsellor, who rages uncontrollably at a pupil, telling her she can expect her life to be "a carnival of pain".

But empathy too is doomed to failure. Classroom outsider Meredith, a talented artist (affectingly played by the director's daughter Betty Kaye), seeks solace in a hug from Henry – at which point, in walks another teacher who misreads the gesture, causing both Henry and Meredith to fly off the handle.

In this world of volatile souls, there's



Bad education: Christina Hendricks

no one quite as tormented as Henry, whose sensitivity indeed makes his life a carnival of pain that Dostoevsky might have gulped at. Inclined to walk the city alone at night, Henry is a magnet for trauma. He offers refuge to stereotypically dolled-up child hooker Erica, and tends to the elderly grandfather who seemingly drove Henry's mother to suicide (in a risibly overdone moment, Henry attempts to reveal the truth by pipingly imitating his mother's voice). For much of *Detachment*, it seems as if all the unrelenting grimness has been laid on less to make a point about American education than to bolster Henry's status as a martyr (Adrien Brody increasingly resembles a medieval Russian icon, with the most sensitively trembling nostrils in cinema).

One other character to command Kaye's interest and respect is Seaboldt, a hard-bitten classroom veteran who

resorts to sarcasm and shock to challenge pupils, at one point using a pornographic image to give a wake-up prod to a girl who wears precociously sexual clothing. Seaboldt is a double to Kaye, who similarly favours an aggressive whatever-works strategy. Working as his own DP, Kaye is omnivorous in his effects and trimmings: onscreen Camus quotes; quasi-documentary footage of Barthes's private musings; interviews with real teachers; blackboard animations; home-movie flashbacks; and a coda in which the school becomes an Usher-like ruin, books flapping in the chill wind of abandon. One could accuse Tony Kaye of many things – overstatement, sentiment, lack of confidence in the viewer's imagination and intelligence – but, in this intensely felt, shamelessly hyperbolic film, detachment certainly isn't one of his failings.

♥♥ Jonathan Romney

## CREDITS

**Producer**  
Austin Stark  
Benji Kohn  
Bingo Gubelmann  
Greg Shapiro  
Carl Lund  
Chris Papavasiliou  
**Written by**  
Carl Lund  
**Director of Photography**  
Tony Kaye  
**Editor**  
Peter Goddard  
**Production Designer**  
Jade Healy  
**Music**  
The Newton Brothers

**Supervising Sound Editor/Recording Mixer**  
Christopher Koch  
**Costume Designer**  
Wendy Schecter

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**Production Companies**  
Tribeca Film in partnership with American Express presents a Paper Street Films presentation in association with Kingsgate Films and Appian Way  
A Tony Kaye talkie

**Executive Producers**  
Adrien Brody  
Henry Barthes  
Peter Sterling  
Andre Laport

## CAST

**Adrien Brody**  
Henry Barthes  
**Marcia Gay Harden**  
Principal Carol Dearden  
**Christina Hendricks**  
Ms Sarah Madison  
**William Petersen**  
Mr Sarge Kepler  
**Bryan Cranston**  
Mr Dearden  
**Tim Blake Nelson**  
Mr Wiatt

**Betty Kaye**  
Meredith  
**Sammy Gayle**  
Erica  
**Lucy Liu**  
Dr Doris Parker  
**Blythe Danner**  
Ms Perkins  
**James Caan**  
Mr Charles Seaboldt

**Distributor**  
G2 Pictures

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

8,794 ft +8 frames

**SYNOPSIS** The US, the present. Substitute English teacher Henry Barthes recalls his month at a high school in crisis.

Henry calmly faces his confrontational students and earns their respect. He visits his grandfather in hospital and faces the possibility that his mother – who killed herself when Henry was a child – had been abused by him. Henry offers refuge in his apartment to teenage hooker Erica. At school, troubled pupil Meredith turns to Henry for comfort; when another teacher walks in on them, Meredith storms out and Henry loses his temper. Henry arranges for Erica to be collected by social workers. On the last day of term, Meredith kills herself with a poisoned cupcake. Now in a foster home, Erica is reunited with Henry. As Henry lectures on Poe's *The Fall of the House of Usher*, the school itself is seen as a ruin.



# Dr Seuss' The Lorax

USA/Japan 2012

Director: Chris Renaud

Certificate U 86m 14s

It's no insult to say that *Dr. Seuss' The Lorax* feels happiest when it's simply being a cartoon – it's something this CGI film (from Illumination Entertainment, makers of *Despicable Me*) does very well. There's a host of funny animals, and the human characters often break into hilariously over-the-top songs and dances, and use the Seussian design of their world – all rollercoaster ramps and curves – to dynamic effect. The boy lead, voiced by Zac Efron, bikes over roofs and plunges down cliffs, and at one point presses a button to spring a plank staircase from a wall, cycling merrily up it. Later, the dwarf villain goes one better, using his henchmen's hands as an escalator.

*Dr. Seuss' The Lorax*, though, is also a cautionary fable, based on Dr Seuss's 1971 rhyming lament for the despoiling of nature by big business. As the film's light satire suddenly shifts into images of ecocatastrophe, the tone feels heavyhanded and bullying after the previous fun and games (the film has been denounced on the Fox Network, along with other supposed liberal propaganda tracts *The Muppets* and *Arrietty*). Some younger children at the preview screenings were bawling at the dark turn; older kids may feel the film's just not playing fair.

In the story, Efron's plucky kid Ted ventures out of the artificial, plastic city where he lives and into the grey wasteland beyond, where he meets grouchy recluse the Once-ler (voiced by

'Dr Seuss' The Lorax'



**SYNOPSIS** Ted is a boy who lives in the plastic city of Thneedville. He's smitten with an older girl, Audrey, who says that she dreams of having a real tree in her garden. Ted's wily granny tells him to ask the recluse Once-ler, who lives in the grey wasteland outside the city walls. Ted makes the perilous journey to the Once-ler's house. Without showing himself, the curmudgeonly Once-ler tells Ted his story over several visits.

When he was young, the Once-ler found a forest paradise teeming with animals, where the trees provided ideal material for his business, manufacturing 'thneed' garments. However, when the Once-ler cuts a tree down, an angry orange creature appears. This is the Lorax, who guards the forest. The Lorax orders the Once-ler to leave – but the thneed garments are hugely successful, and the Once-ler is pressured by his greedy family to cut down all the trees. Corrupted, the Once-ler wipes out the whole forest and drives all the animals away, regretting his actions when it's too late. The Lorax condemns him and rises into the sky.

The Once-ler gives Ted the forest's last seed. However, Thneedville's greedy mayor O'Hare knows that the seed will break his power and pursues Ted for it. Helped by his granny and Audrey, Ted plants the seed in the town centre and persuades the people to let the forest grow again. O'Hare is thrown out, and the Lorax reappears to forgive the repentant Once-ler.

Ed Helms) and learns what blighted the world. This cues a second story, told in flashback, in which Helms's optimistic bumpkin finds a paradise of happy animals and silky trees and wreaks ecological havoc, at first innocently, then in the full knowledge of his crimes. The film cuts between the two narratives, which saps its momentum, especially as we know how the bumpkin's story will end. There are zany cartoon gags and images – a sequence with marshmallows is every bit as weird as 2009's *Cloudy with a Chance of Meatballs* – but the story's main perils are disappointingly standard: a wild river ride, a road chase.

The other big problem is the title character, a gruff orange critter with a walrus moustache and Danny DeVito's voice. Neither asset is enough to make him interesting or fun, especially when he's set beside singing fish, cute bears and a show-stealing groovy granny (Betty White). As the film's voice of conscience, the Lorax has nothing on Jiminy Cricket in Disney's *Pinocchio* (1940). The Efron story – invented for the film – has a boy who's motivated not by morality but rather by the desire to please a pretty girl. Surely the writers could have contrived some dilemma for the lad, illustrating the material costs of doing good, which is a subject that this eco-lesson conspicuously avoids.

◆◆ Andrew Osmond

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Chris Meledandri  
Janet Healy

**Screenplay**  
Cinco Paul

**Based on the book by**  
Dr Seuss

**Edited by**  
Ken Schretzmann  
Claire Dodgson  
Steven Liu

**Art Director**  
Eric Guillon

**Production Designer**  
Yarrow Cheney

**MUSIC**

John Powell

**Sound Designer/Supervising**

**Sound Editor**

Randy Thom

**Animation Director**

Lionel Gallat

©Universal Studios

**Production Companies**

Universal Pictures  
presents a Chris Meledandri production  
In association with Dentsu, Inc.

## Executive Producers

Audrey Geisel  
Ken Daurio  
Cinco Paul

## VOICE CAST

**Danny DeVito**  
The Lorax

**Ed Helms**  
The Once-ler

**Zac Efron**  
Ted

**Taylor Swift**  
Audrey

**Betty White**  
Grammy Norma

**Rob Riggie**  
Mr. O'Hare

**Jenny Slate**  
Ted's mom

**Nasim Pedrad**  
Once-ler's mom

**Dolby Digital/**

**Datasat/SDDS**

**In Colour**

**[1.85:1]**

**Distributor**

Universal Pictures  
International UK & Eire

**7,761 ft +0 frames**

# Eames The Architect and the Painter

USA 2011

Directors: Jason Cohn, Bill Jersey

The first thing we see, it almost goes without saying, is the chair – moulded plywood and cushiony black leather create a recliner that's as comfortable as it's aesthetically pleasing. Form and function combine effortlessly in the best of Charles and Ray Eames's work, but if you thought they were all about that particular chair and the famous photograph of them in profile on a motorbike, then this biographical documentary provides a useful primer on the extraordinary multiplicity of their output. Among the myriad interviewees, director Paul Schrader talks of "Eames-era" to describe the economically buoyant America of the 1950s and how it brought a whole new generation of home-makers wanting to define themselves through the sort of stylish contemporary furniture the Eames studio was providing for them, operating under the couple's prime directive: the best for the most for the least. Now that TV's *Mad Men* has put the executive styles of that generation into current focus, it's a good time to look back at the achievement of the Eameses and their California-based team. This production for US public television's *American Masters* strand does a thorough enough job, even if it's hardly distinctive in itself.

Although receiving a cinema release on these shores, this is essentially a piece of arts TV, its collation of talking heads, archive footage, splashes of animation and celebrity narration (actor James Franco does an admittedly impeccable job) a very familiar combination. The approach is straightforwardly chronological, an array of co-workers and colleagues delivering their testimony alongside ample period footage of Charles and Ray themselves. It's all solid horse's-mouth stuff as the documentary addresses the demarcation lines in their creative partnership and traces how an idiosyncratic interest in film and photography filtered into a whole series of corporate commissions for promotional films and exhibition design. While the chairs and shelving units still in production today attest to the functionality and timelessness of their touch, what comes over here is how they were multimedia before anyone had conjured up the term, the multi-screen films they put together to show America at its best to the Russians (!) and the elaborate US bicentennial exhibition 'The World of Franklin and Jefferson' (combining text, artefacts, photographs and a stuffed bison) manifesting their passionate belief in the interconnectedness of things. This material is some of the most captivating here, though it's also a treat to see some of the Eameses' short films, celebrating the world of toys and spinning tops with childlike glee and a designer's forensic gaze.

Filmmakers Jason Cohn and Bill Jersey are certainly enthusiasts – after all, it's hard not to be swept up by Ray and Charles's evident delight at turning play into work – though they do stop just short of hagiography, hinting at a certain dissent in the ranks at the lack of credit for the hardworking studio crew, and pulling out a toe-curling 1957 TV chat-show appearance in which husband and wife struggle to escape the gender stereotyping of the day. It's slightly disappointing that the film also feels the need to dish the dirt on their occasional marital difficulties, but it's an indication that it's pitched at a fairly broad audience, hence the relatively scant aesthetic contextualisation or analysis lest unfamiliar references cause fright to the unsuspecting viewer. A decent journeyman offering then, though you can't help feeling Charles and Ray deserved something just that bit sharper in its insights and more challenging in form. ◆◆ Trevor Johnston

## CREDITS

**Produced by**

Jason Cohn

Bill Jersey

**Narration Written by**

Jason Cohn

**Cinematography**

Ulli Bonnekamp

Edgar Boyles

Brian Dowley

Andrew Dryer

Vicente Franco

Tom Hurwitz

Edward Marriz

Jon Shenk

Petr Stepanek

Thaddeus Wadleigh

Brett Wiley

Brian Wingert

**Edited by**

Don Bernier

**Musical Score**

Michael Bacon

**Sound Recording**

Brian Buckley

Mario Cardenas

Douglas Dunderdale

Steve Haskin

Mark Mandler

Gabriel Monts

David Pickner

Jayme Roy

Bob Schuck

John Zecca

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and Bread and  
Butter Films

**Production Companies**

A production of Quest  
Productions, Bread  
and Butter Films

In association with  
THIRTEEN's American  
Masters for WNET.org

Major funding for  
this production was  
provided by The

National Endowment  
for the Humanities,  
IBM Corporate

Underwriting, The  
National Endowment  
for the Arts

For American Masters

**Executive Producer**

Shirley Kessler

**Narrated by**

James Franco

**In Colour**

**[1.85:1]**

**Distributor**

Soda Pictures

**SYNOPSIS** A documentary portrait of Charles and Ray Eames, the California-based couple whose multifarious output from the 1940s through to the 1970s made them arguably the century's most significant force in American design. Archive footage and interviews with the Eameses and former members of their studio as well as biographers and curators show how their restless curiosity took them from furniture design to highly personal filmmaking and photography, and thence into a raft of corporate design commissions. An exploration of their working dynamic shows how Ray's innate feeling for colour and composition shaped their output, while architecture dropout Charles was fascinated by physical problem-solving – later developing an interest in mathematics and science which left his wife and creative partner slightly sidelined. The story continues up to the poor reception for their overambitious bicentennial show at New York's Metropolitan Museum of Art, Charles's sudden death in 1978 and Ray's demise a decade later.



# El Bulli Cooking in Progress

Germany 2010

Director: Gereon Wetzel

Molecular gastronomy sounds like science fiction, food as served aboard the Enterprise, but – as the British television-viewing public well knows – it's a food trend exemplified by Heston Blumenthal, star of a number of cooking series, and his chief competitor Ferran Adrià, chef-patron of Catalan restaurant El Bulli. Unlike Blumenthal, Adrià has not yet brought his vision to the viewing public, and on the basis of this German documentary is the austere avant garde to Blumenthal's high-spirited joker. While many techniques on show here – sous-vide, foams, milk skins, emulsions – will be familiar to *MasterChef* fans, viewers looking for a how-to guide to preparing a minted ice lake or pumpkin meringue sandwich (two of the most recognisable and tempting dishes on the 2009 menu whose research and preparation is documented here) will be disappointed, as will those expecting an intimate portrait of the artist as man of taste.

Instead, director Gereon Wetzel employs classical observational techniques to compose a compelling if understructured portrait of the business of creativity in the medium of food. Viewers may get no closer to understanding Adrià's intentions, or his taste buds, but the penultimate sequence, in which the chef sits alone in El Bulli's busy kitchen, eating all 35 dishes created for that season's menu (the last before the restaurant transforms into a culinary academy), inspires both wonder and melancholy. The film's sparing use of the chef – he barely features at all for the first 35 minutes – heightens the sense of his presence, and lightly constructs this scene as the apex of the sketchy drama. When Adrià is shown laughing at the end of his long meal, we breathe a sigh of relief.

That sense of involvement is in no small part due to the central personality of the film: not Adrià but his creative co-director Oriol Castro. Mediating gracefully between the demanding chef and El Bulli's large team of kitchen staff, Castro is a sympathetic character whose puckish wit and extraordinary forbearance come into focus in conversation with his assistant and foil, the boyish enthusiast Eduard Xatruch, as they try to second-guess the mercurial Adrià. Yet this light characterisation is



Food for thought: Ferran Adrià

secondary to the attempts to capture two interconnected intangibles: the process of creativity, from intuition to realisation, and the affective impact of the food.

Adrià tells his staff in a workshop that the aim of El Bulli is not to provide taste but something resembling T.S. Eliot's idea of 'felt thought', an emotional experience conveying an idea to the diner. Close-ups of mushroom gills and of deft fingers syringing liquids into tiny rice-paper envelopes combine with Stephan Diethelm's low-key but effective score in an attempt to summon the experience of eating at El Bulli. In her influential 2000 book *The Skin of the Film*, Laura U. Marks identified the ways in which experimental documentaries break with classical technique to find ways of conveying smell, taste and touch to viewers. Lacking these kind of haptic innovations, Wetzel's documentary never really gets under Adrià's skin – but the creation of the frozen, juiced, glossy surfaces of the food is fascinating. **♥♥ Sophie Mayer**

## CREDITS

**Producer**  
Ingo Fleiss  
**Concept**  
Anna Ginestí Rosell  
Gereon Wetzel  
**Camera**  
Josef Mayerhofer  
**Editor**  
Anja Pohl  
**Music**  
Stephan Diethelm  
**Sound**  
Daniel Samer  
Gereon Wetzel

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BR/WDR  
**Production Companies**  
An If... Productions  
production in  
co-production with  
Bayerischen Rundfunk

and Westdeutschen  
Rundfunk  
Sponsored by  
BKM, FFF Bayern,  
Kuratorium Junger  
Deutscher Film  
Productions Zeigt

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
**[1.85:1]**  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Artificial Eye Film  
Company

# Electrick Children

Director: Rebecca Thomas

"Sweet spirits – that's what we called the ugly girls at the colony," says diffident Mormon boy Mr Will, high on tranquilisers, his broken arm supported by a bass drum. It's one of the funnier lines in Rebecca Thomas's debut feature *Electrick Children*, about a brother and sister who loose themselves from a Mormon community when 15-year-old Rachel (Julia Garner) is made pregnant by a mixtape. At a loss to explain their daughter's pregnancy, parents Paul and Gay point the finger at eldest son Mr Will and arrange for Rachel to be married to a good local boy. Absconding in the night to find a father for her baby, Rachel heads to Las Vegas, accidentally taking her brother – who has fallen asleep in their father's truck – along with her.

The film begins well, with Thomas depicting the Mormon community as a benign and lenient stronghold: Rachel's father is a devout and peaceful head of the colony; her mother makes no attempt to hide from her daughters her weakness in the face of temptation (pivotal to the plot is the girls' favourite bedtime story, involving their mother in a weak-kneed encounter with a man in a red Mustang). In this way, *Electrick Children* has more in common with *Witness* (1985), which was set in Amish Pennsylvania, than with Sean Durkin's *Martha Marcy May Marlene* (2011), about a sham-religious cult (also featuring Garner, as Elizabeth Olsen's tender-aged inductee). Durkin's film took a more diagnostic view of ritualised, insular society in modern America, and yet Thomas's innocuous spiritual

commune emerges the more believable.

Sadly, the film lets down in Las Vegas, where it's expected that Rachel will be forced to reckon with her religious beliefs and especially with the conviction that she's fallen pregnant by listening to The Nerves' recording of 'Hanging on the Telephone'. (In fact, Thomas's film gives full backing to this interpretation of events.) Instead Rachel falls in with dropout Clyde and his musician friends, a group of drifting stoner types who, as members of the elective dispossessed, are not dissimilar to Rachel herself. The most accepting of teenagers, they are only momentarily taken aback by the arrival of "a prairie girl" and a boy in corduroy slacks on the back-alley Vegas music scene. The siblings are invited to stay at their fetid headquarters and even lent skateboards and sunglasses. One can't help feeling that the film would have been more interesting had Thomas forced her protagonist into riskier territory.

Nevertheless, Thomas's writing is good, giving her actors a freedom they more than repay. Her direction also leaves out more than it lets in, but less successfully, threatening to depreciate the holistic efficiency of the script. Thomas bids for methodical, articulated storytelling to the detriment of atmosphere, so that Vegas ends up feeling as neighbourly and navigable as the siblings' Mormon homestead in the Utah desert. What it wants to be, in style, is Sofia Coppola's *Somewhere* (2010) – but Thomas hasn't Coppola's sense of humour, fresh-picturesque framing or confidence with music, though these may come with time and experience.

The film loses its way in the last third but the performances keep it afloat. Garner is lucent as Rachel, managing to offset her angelic physicality with a lively resolve that makes for an original, not



Expectant faith: Julia Garner, Rory Culkin

**SYNOPSIS** Catalonia, Spain, January 2009. Ferran Adrià's celebrated restaurant El Bulli closes its doors for a six-month research break. Creative co-director Oriol Castro, supported by head chef Eduard Xatruch, leads the small team that will develop the flavours and textures to be used in the following season's dishes. Moving between a basement kitchen lab and Barcelona's La Boqueria food market, Castro and Xatruch search out the key raw ingredients – eel, sweet potato, mushrooms, grapes, yuzu – and experiment with techniques including sous-vide (vacuum) cooking and making mini-raviolis of reductions in obulato, a form of rice paper. Adrià samples and refines works in progress.

In June, the restaurant reopens. Castro trains the kitchen and front-of-house staff in the preparation and presentation of the dishes, and Adrià explains the restaurant's innovative philosophy. Opening night brings praise, happy accidents and further refinements to the menu. Adrià tastes all 35 courses.



always likeable character. Rory Culkin is a highlight as Clyde, whose comparatively normal if prosperous childhood has left him existentially marooned and with a muddled understanding of himself.

Overall, it's a promising start. With a little more bravura and a compatible art director, Thomas could be one to watch.

♦♦ **Thirza Wakefield**

## CREDITS

### Producers

Producers  
Jessica Caldwell  
Richard Neustadter

### Writer

Rebecca Thomas

### Director of Photography

Snow

### Editor

Jennifer Lilly

### Production Designer

Elizabeth Van Dam

### Music

Eric Colvin

### Sound Mixer

Anthony Enns

### Costume Designer

Stacey Berman

Gay Lynn

Billy Zane

Paul

John Patrick Amedori

Johnny

Rachel Pirard

Sara

Cassidy Gard

Snow

Paola Baldion

Lola

In Colour

[1.85:1]

### Distributor

Revolver

Entertainment/

Picturehouse ???

## CAST

Julia Garner

Rachel

Rory Culkin

Clyde

Liam Aiken

Mr Will

Bill Sage

Tim

Cynthia Watros

## SYNOPSIS

Utah, the present.

Mormon patriarch Paul tapes an interview with his daughter Rachel on her 15th birthday. Searching for the recording later that night Rachel finds a second tape, which has music on it. When she discovers she's pregnant, she believes that God meant her to conceive when she listened to the song on the tape. Learning of Rachel's condition, her father decides that she should marry Ben, a boy from their community. Rachel's brother Mr Will – suspected of forcing himself on his sister – is sent away. Rachel takes the family truck and runs away to Las Vegas, accompanied by Mr Will.

In Las Vegas Rachel meets Clyde and his friends, and spends the night at their place. She sets her sights on singer Johnny as a father figure for her 'Jesus baby'. Clyde suggests that Rachel marry him instead. Rachel, Clyde, Mr Will and a girlfriend break into Clyde's parents' house. Clyde's father calls the police; Mr Will is apprehended and taken into juvenile detention. Rachel takes the truck and follows a red Mustang, believing that it will lead her to the father of her child – the singer on her tape. When the car pulls into a trailer park, she introduces herself to the owner, who is revealed to be an old flame of her mother's, and her own biological father. Rachel returns alone to the Mormon community. Her real father obtains Mr Will's release and drives him home. Clyde goes after Rachel but runs out of petrol on the way. He is picked up by the red Mustang and makes it to the church in time to prevent Rachel's wedding to Ben. Mr Will rejoins the family. Rachel and Clyde drive to Las Vegas.

# A Fantastic Fear of Everything

United Kingdom 2011

Director: Crispian Mills

Certificate 15 100m 12s

Despite his general image as an amusing, likeable guy, Simon Pegg's characters often have an ugly side to them. There's an insecurity, a petulance and an arrogance about his screen persona that can be traced throughout his work from TV series *Spaced* through *Shaun of the Dead* and *Run Fatboy Run* to its most smarmy incarnation in *How to Lose Friends & Alienate People*. In *A Fantastic Fear of Everything* we get to see the extreme version of his immature male. He plays Jack, an unsuccessful crime novelist whose research into 19th-century murders has left him a delusional, housebound paranoiac.

Designed to chill but peppered with Pegg's characteristic understatement and non sequiturs (his fans will be pleased with his earnestly delivered response to therapy – "I think it's time I faced my banana"), *A Fantastic Fear of Everything* is something of a return to the actor's origins in comedy-horror. Indeed, Jack is a role that Pegg would appear to relish, the first third of the film containing an almost single-handed performance of drawn-out dread to which he responds with panicked pratfalls and exaggerated terror. Debut writer/director Crispian Mills enjoys manipulating his audience in this part of the film, alternating shock reveals with comic flourishes that, at moments, can be unexpectedly amusing. The set designs, by production designer/co-director Chris Hopewell, balance a knowing pastiche of creepy sets with the plausibility and dramatic functionality necessary for both the horror and the comedy to thrive.

Alas, these moments of inspiration can do little to disguise the film's glaring structural problems. Despite Pegg's ability to hold an audience, the first part of the film is desperately in need

## SYNOPSIS

London, the present. Jack has given up a successful career as a children's author to become a crime novelist, but his research into Victorian murders has left him with agoraphobia and extreme paranoia. When Jack's agent insists that he leave his house to meet a film executive, Jack attempts to conquer his demons by confronting his greatest fear – the launderette where he was abandoned as a child.

Jack visits the launderette and realises that he is no longer afraid – but is then attacked and tied up in the basement with Sangeet, a woman he's met at the launderette. Jack eventually uses his storytelling gifts to persuade their kidnapper, Smythe, to set them free.

Some time later, Jack has successfully returned to children's literature and is romantically involved with Sangeet.



Primal scream: Simon Pegg

of a plot. When it finally arrives – it emerges that Jack doesn't have a fear of everything, rather a fear of launderettes – it's too far removed from the film's initial premise to satisfy. Similarly, the final third of the film, in which Jack is kidnapped and held in the basement of a launderette, is too detached from the ideas at the start to make any sense.

This disastrous structuring is a huge problem but perhaps not a wholly damaging one. Elsewhere in the film, Hopewell creates a beautiful animation to accompany one of Jack's stories, reminiscent of the award-winning video he made for Radiohead's 'There There'. Creative flourishes such as this suggest that he, like Mills, may yet have greater things to offer.

♦♦ **Dylan Cave**

## CREDITS

### Co-director

Chris Hopewell

### Produced by

Geraldine Patten

### Written by

Crispian Mills

### Director of Photography

Simon Chaudoir

### Edited by

Dan Roberts

### Production Designer

Chris Hopewell

### Music

Michael Price

### Production Sound Mixer

Jerome McCann

### Costume Designer

Louise Foley

### Visual Effects

Big Bang Post

### Production

Vine Post Production

### ©Sensitive Artist

Productions Limited

### Production Companies

Universal Pictures

presents in association

with Indomina

Releasing, Pinewood

Films and The Works

International a Keel

Films production

### Executive Producers

Johnny Fewings

Simon Pegg

Nick Smith

Steve Norris

Jasbinder Singh Mann

Pat Savage

Mick Southworth

## CAST

Simon Pegg

Jack

Amara Karan

Sangeet

Clare Higgins

Clair De Grunwald

Alan Drake

Perkins

Paul Freeman

Dr Friedkin

Jacqui Chan

launderette

grande dame

Michael Feast

maitre d' & Eye of Death

Tamzin Griffin

Caligula

Golda John

bashful African lady

Simon Kunz

Police Sergeant

Smythe

Tuyet Le

launderette warden

Henry Lloyd-Hughes

PC Taser

### Dolby

In Colour

[1.85:1]

### Distributor

Universal Pictures

International UK & Eire

9,018 ft +0 frames

# The Giants

Belgium/France/Luxembourg 2011

Director: Bouli Lanners

Certificate 15 83m 43s

Fifteen is a difficult age for boys – no longer a child but hardly tough or streetwise enough to square up to older lads on the very cusp of adulthood. A time of yearning, frustration and not a little anxiety, it's territory that has been effectively mined by Shane Meadows in the likes of *Somers Town* (2008). This third directorial outing for noted Belgian comic actor Bouli Lanners – known for his collaborations with black humorists Gustave de Kervern and Benoît Delépine, including his semi-legendary karaoke rendition of 'Sunny' in their cult favourite *Aaltra* (2004) – certainly overlaps with Meadows in terms of theme and subject-matter, yet the cinematic sensibility is rather different, Lanners's saga of errant adolescence laid out in painterly, composed widescreen frames suggesting a kind of mythologising for the story's happy-scrappy central trio.

Brothers Zak and Seth have been left to their own devices in their late grandpa's rather shabby country house, but this is no carefree idyll. Sure, they can hang out with pal Dany, smoke a little weed and nick supplies from their neighbour's cellar, but when the money runs out, what's next? Their misadventures include rowing downriver in a stolen boat, camping out overnight, even breaking into a presumed-vacant holiday home where they empty the cocktail cabinet and hit the peroxide in the bathroom cupboard – but all this is displacement activity for an unavoidable reckoning with the adult world. They cook up a money-spinning scheme but it gets them mixed up with a somewhat scary oddball named Beef, a cannabis supplier rumoured to have killed a man with a death-stare. We assume there can only be one winner in this off-kilter encounter, especially when the villain hires Dany's abusive older sibling Angel as the muscle to seal his crooked deal. So much for paddling around and messing about – this is the real world and it's cruel.

Lanners, though, isn't one for the dramatic confrontation, or indeed the carefully plotted narrative trajectory you'll find in, say, Rob Reiner's *Stand by Me* (1986). His approach is elliptical, setting out scenes in a tableaux style so that they have time to register visually, then moving us on to the next episode. Some viewers may find this somewhat exasperating, as if he's never really clarifying the key turning points or making the most of his material. The three young performers are so assured throughout, whether suggesting the deep hurt caused by maternal absence or discussing the masturbatory benefits of chilli sauce, that we're left wondering whether the story might have generated even more impact by pushing them that bit harder emotionally.

Still, while there's enough rudery to convey the kids' eagerness to partake of adult pleasures, the emphasis on boating, camping and secret forest hideaways surely points us in the direction of children's literature of yesteryear





The outsiders: Zacharie Chasseriaud, Martin Nissen, Paul Bartel

← – was Enid Blyton big in Belgium? Taken together with the pronounced mythologising of Lanners's widescreen vistas (whose river views in fact derive from locations in Luxembourg), it seems that the essence of the film is actually about pitting the innocent optimism of old-school children's stories against the gnarly demands of growing up today. Shifting into a fabulist mode for the final

landscape shot leaves it to the viewers to ponder the outcome for our resilient trio – heroic affirmation or hopeless abnegation? The answer perhaps is found in each viewer's own capacity to reconnect with their inner child. As such, this is a film that stays with you, resonating deeper than many a more cut-and-dried rites-of-passage tale.

♦♦ Trevor Johnston

## CREDITS

**Produced by** Jacques-Henri Bronckart  
Olivier Bronckart  
Simon Arnal  
Carole Scotta  
Jani Thiliges  
**Written by** Bouli Lanners  
Elise Ancion  
**Director of Photography** Jean-Paul de Zaetijd  
**Editor** Erwin Ryckaert  
**Art Director** Paul Rouschop  
**Music** The Bony King of Nowhere  
**Sound Recordist** Philippe Kohn  
**Costume Designer** Elise Ancion

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**Production Companies** Versus Production presents with Haut et Court and Samsa Film a Versus Production, Haut et Court, Samsa Film, Art France Cinéma, RTBF (Télévision belge) co-production With the participation of Fonds national de soutien à la production audiovisuelle du Grand-Duché de Luxembourg, Centre national di cinema et de l'image animée With the help of Centre du Cinéma et de l'Audiovisuel de la

Communauté française de Belgique et de VOO With the participation of Orange Cinéma Séries, Canal+, Belgacom, Arte France, Région Wallonne, Memento Films International With the support of Tax Shelter du Gouvernement Fédéral Belge In partnership with Inver Invest, Casa Kafka Pictures-Dexia With the help of Media de la Communauté Européenne Executive Producer Gwenaëlle Libert

## CAST

Zacharie Chasseriaud  
Zak  
Paul Bartel  
Dany

**Martin Nissen**  
Seth  
**Karim Lecloux**  
Angel  
**Didier Toupy**  
Beef  
**Gwen Berrou**  
Martha  
**Marthe Keller**  
Rosa

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Artificial Eye Film Company

7,534 ft +8 frames

Belgian/French/  
Luxembourgian  
theatrical title  
**Les Géants**

# God Bless America

USA 2011

Director: Bobcat Goldthwait

Certificate 15 104m 3s

Midway through Bobcat Goldthwait's gleefully outrageous spree-killer comedy, mad-as-hell middle-aged schlub Frank (Joel Murray) and his admiring 16-year-old partner-in-crime Roxy (Tara Lynne Barr) take a breather from their cross-country purge to watch a documentary about the My Lai massacre in a nearly empty cinema. The presentation is preceded by the familiar onscreen requests to turn off mobile phones and refrain from talking, and by this point in Goldthwait's exhaustive inventory of the annoyances of modern life you'll know what's coming. When Frank and Roxy empty out their shotguns on the vapid teens chatting and sniggering in a row behind them, then on a hapless cellphone user, short-fused film fans from here to Los Angeles will recognise their darkest fantasies given glorious life.

A remorseless vivisection of American culture in the reality-TV age, *God Bless America* begins with a montage of contemporary televisual horrors, as Frank sits in his apartment, channel-hopping between infantile commercials, extreme stunts going wrong, a rightwing commentator pillorying a grieving mother's anti-war activism and a tuneless no-hoper getting savaged by a talent-contest jury. Modern life is rubbish, and Frank's not going to take it any more. Appalled by television's cacophonous appeals to the lowest common denominator and a society in stupefied thrall to its inanities, Frank is clearly a mouthpiece for Goldthwait's own despair. As such, it would be all too simple to write off this rant of a film as one-sided and easy-targeted were it not often riotously funny and movingly sincere.

Goldthwait is a dab hand at counterbalancing the scandalous and the heartfelt: his delightful 2006 romcom *Sleeping Dogs Lie* hinged on the destructive potency of a woman's guilty secret that she once fellated her dog. In *God Bless America*, Frank and Roxy's shockingly pitiless serial killings, beginning with a rich-girl celebrity teen whose shallowness epitomises the cultural wasteland Frank so despises, are interposed with

hilariously cutting broadsides aimed at everyone from R. Kelly to Diablo Cody. At their heart is a profound sense of loss: as Frank laments – after sticking it to Woody Allen for his “the-heart-wants-what-it-wants bullshit” – “Nobody cares that they damage other people.”

Still, nothing does damage like a bullet to the head and, while Frank may be a more eloquent crusader than Travis Bickle, his campaign shares the same bloodthirsty contradiction. *God Bless America* indulges its avengers' relish in wiping out some of the world's pond-life while at the same time subtly pointing up their undertaking's woeful moral limitations. After shooting the TV commentator during his morning jog, Frank deadpans that he agrees with the political right on one issue: deregulated gun control. “Then every nut will have a gun,” Roxy retorts, her liberal ire flaring up without a trace of irony.

A less violent solution for Frank's malaise is adumbrated early in the film, when an office colleague questions how Frank knows so much about the vacuous talent show he's being so sniffy about (“You didn't watch it, but you saw it?”). Television's there in Frank's home; it's there in the motel rooms he stays in; it's on when he goes to bed, and it's on when he wakes in the morning. He might think to turn it off.

♦♦ Samuel Wigley

## CREDITS

**Produced by** Sean McKittrick  
Jeff Culotta  
**Written by** Bobcat Goldthwait  
**Cinematographer** Bradley Stonesifer  
**Editors** Jason Stewart  
David Hopper  
**Production Designer** Natalie Sanfilippo  
**Original Score** Matt Kollar  
**Location Sound Mixer** Arran Murphy  
**Costume Designer** Sarah de Sa Rego

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**Production Companies** Darko Entertainment presents in association with Jerkschool Productions  
**Executive Producers** Edward H. Hamm Jr

## CAST

Joel Murray  
Frank  
Tara Lynne Barr

Roxy  
Melinda Page Hamilton  
Alison Mackenzie  
Brooke Smith  
Ava  
Rich McDonald  
Brad  
Maddie Hasson  
Chloe  
Larry Miller  
Chloe's dad  
Dorie Barton  
Chloe's mom  
Travis Wester  
Ed  
Lauren Phillips  
Ed's wife  
Guerrin Gardner  
tampon throwing  
Tuff Girl  
Kellie Marie Ramdhanie  
Melissa, Tuff Girl  
Aris Alvarado  
Steven Clark

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited  
9,411 ft +0 frames

**SYNOPSIS** Los Angeles, the present. Insurance salesman Frank Murdock sits alone in his apartment, flicking between television channels, disgusted by the cruel talent contests and vacuous shows. Next day at work, the office is buzzing with talk of Steve Clark, a tuneless American Superstarz contestant. When Frank sends flowers to a secretary, it is interpreted as harassment, and he is fired.

Told by a doctor that he has a brain tumour, Frank decides to kill himself, though not before assassinating Chloe, a self-obsessed teenage reality-TV star. This act of insurrection inspires the admiration of one of the girl's classmates, Roxy, who follows Frank to his motel and dissuades him from suicide in favour of a continuing cross-country campaign to kill those they deem self-serving or unkind. Their victims include noisy cinema patrons, homophobic religious conservatives and a hate-mongering TV anchorman. When they hear about Steve Clark's attempted suicide, they decide to pay the American Superstarz studio a visit. Breaking on to the set, Frank shoots at security guards who try to intervene, then delivers a speech to camera about the lack of kindness in American society. When Steve reveals that he attempted suicide not because he had been ostracised but because he feared never appearing on television again, Frank kills him. Frank and Roxy are shot dead by security guards.



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# Harold's Going Stiff

United Kingdom 2012

Director: Keith Wright

Certificate: not submitted 76m

Not only is writer-director Keith Wright's *Harold's Going Stiff* a low-budget zombie comedy – a field overcrowded with shambling shaggy dead stories since *Shaun of the Dead* (2004) – but it's also an entry in that other presently exhausted subgenre of horror, the mock documentary. Talking-head interviews with the principals and the odd aside to camera ("I hope you didn't film that") suggest a tagalong crew, though whoever is making the documentary stays offscreen and silent and the film defaults to a more traditional cinema style for many sequences. Given that Wright has ticked so many familiar boxes, only a real originality within played-out categories can hope to elevate this from the rut. After a shaky start (a few too many bowel jokes), *Harold's Going Stiff* manages just that.

It's been a commonplace of the zombie-apocalypse movie since George Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) that it requires a want of human feeling tantamount to becoming a zombie to join the monster-killing vigilante posses who roam through the genre – though this point has been blurred by computer games and their derivatives, which sell re-killing the living dead as uproarious fun. Here, bellowing yahoos hunt down stray sufferers of a new neurological disease and batter them to death on the grounds that they are basically zombies: the disease, apparently brought on by the consumption of a savoury snack (Meat-a-Rino), causes a stiffening of the joints and a mental deterioration leading to occasional cannibalism. The vigilante gangs shout their prize quarry's name like a football insult – "Gim-bulllll!" – and justify themselves by denying the humanity of their victims. They make obnoxious fun of a junior member, who finally nerves up to bludgeon sympathetic pensioner Harold Gimble to death with a length of pipe (a climax conveyed in tactful long-shot) in this genial film's only moment of horror. Otherwise, uniquely for the subgenre, this presents a zombie plague that isn't incurable. The early symptoms of the disease are caricatures of debilitating old age: stiff joints that force a Ministry of



'Harold's Going Stiff'

Silly Walks gait on sufferers and make mundane tasks like wiping one's bottom or making a cup of tea almost impossible.

There are several faithful-beyond-death zombie romances (*Neither the Sea nor the Sand* and *Return of the Living Dead Part III* are more serious entries in the field, while *My Boyfriend's Back* and *Boy Eats Girl* play it for laughs) but this hinges on a sweeter, paternal relationship between widowed, crotchety, stubborn yet decent Harold and Nurse Penny, a cheerfully big girl humiliated by computer dating and fiercely protective of her patient. Stan Rowe and Sarah Spencer, as unlike a conventional screen couple as you could imagine, get slightly-too-broad material at the outset but warm up as the situations become more poignant, and give excellent performances.

Scattershot funny, this has a core of anger at the way being old, forgetful, ill or even fat can render folk indistinguishable from zombies in the eyes of other people happy to pass an afternoon smashing their brains out with baseball bats. **Kim Newman**

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Richard Guy  
**Written by**  
Keith Wright  
**Camera**  
Keith Wright  
**Editing**  
Keith Wright  
**Music**  
Tom Kane  
**Sound Recordist**  
Grant Bridgeman

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**Production Company**  
Frisson Film

## CAST

**Stan Rowe**  
Harold Gimble  
**Sarah Spencer**  
Penny Rudge  
**Andy Pandini**  
Jon Grayson  
**Phil Gascayne**  
Dr Norbert Shuttleworth

**Lee Thompson**  
Mike Jacksmith  
**Richard Harrison**  
Colin  
**Liz Simmons**  
June Peterson  
**Tim Rutherford**  
Dr Ash  
**Michaela Rowe**  
Nurse Mathews  
**Roger Bingham**  
news reporter  
**Molly Howe**  
Stacey Tattle

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Frisson Film Ltd

Not submitted for  
theatrical classification  
Video certificate: 15  
Running time: 76m 27s

# The Hunter

Australia 2011

Director: Daniel Nettheim

Certificate 15 101m 34s

Watching its first few scenes, you might be forgiven for writing off *The Hunter* as merely another moody, European-flavoured hitman saga. The tropes are familiar: a chilly, Melvillean blank of an operator waits for a loaded phone call, gathers the tools of his trade and receives brusque instructions from a client's intermediary. But thereafter, as Willem Dafoe's titular mercenary studies a video detailing the biological quirks of his quarry, the supposedly extinct Tasmanian tiger, Daniel Nettheim's handsome film becomes a more beguiling proposition entirely. Although far from original in tracing how a presumed man of violence belatedly finds reserves of humanity, the film factors ecology, identity and small-town conflict into the mix – a heady brew that *The Hunter's* lean frame can't ultimately contain without feeling a little curtailed and disjointed.

Adapted by Alice Addison from a novel by *Sleeping Beauty* director Julia Leigh, *The Hunter* – like Leigh's film – presents a character entering into an outlandish contract that forms an eyebrow-raising means of remuneration. Dafoe's Martin David (an alias) is hired by a shady biotech firm to go to Tasmania and hunt and retrieve DNA from the tiger, following reports from islanders of sightings. Posing as a university researcher, Martin immediately intrudes on a bitter dispute between eco-activists and the local loggers who are out of work as a result. The activists' leader, expat Jarrah, vanished months ago in the mountains close to the tiger's habitat; Martin experiences the trauma of his disappearance first hand when he reluctantly lodges at the missing man's dilapidated bohemian guesthouse. There he finds Jarrah's bereft wife Lucy

(Frances O'Connor), addled from sleeping pills, and two children disconcertingly eager for a surrogate father.

We never learn anything of Martin's past but Dafoe, bearded and craggy, powerfully implies a lifetime of tumult. The tiger's lonely uniqueness mirrors Martin's sense of himself as an island; remote and cranky, he insists always on working solo. There are intriguing echoes of Antonioni's *The Passenger* (1975) as Martin – essentially a tabula rasa – inadvertently begins to absorb Jarrah's role both at home and out in the wilderness. One remarkable scene has him literally bring the guesthouse out of stasis as he fires up a neglected generator: lights spark up, an abandoned record starts playing, and an addled Lucy, imagining Jarrah's return, runs to Martin, who awkwardly returns her desperate embrace. Tasked with plundering the ancient land and its rare wildlife, Martin simultaneously restores life to Lucy's ruptured home. When this grudging interloper learns that he and Jarrah have a lot more in common than he could ever have imagined, it provokes a crisis – the lone wolf realising that he's not such a rare commodity after all.

*The Hunter* is rather episodically split between near-silent sequences of Martin painstakingly tracking his prey in the Tasmanian wilderness and those that trace the escalating tensions back in civilisation. While the former possess a spare, elemental focus, the latter aren't always successful in narrative terms. There's plenty to chew on – Martin's brushes with the hostile unemployed locals; his strained relationship with an ambiguous town busybody (Sam Neill); the motivations of both the eco-activists and the biotech company – but making them all pay off satisfactorily is beyond the film's reach, and the stark denouement feels too hurried. But there are ample compensations: Robert Humphreys's camera mesmerisingly captures the otherworldly Tasmanian landscapes, while Andrew Lancaster, Michael



Look who's stalking: Willem Dafoe

**SYNOPSIS** The north of England, the present. Elderly widower Harold Gimble is the first recorded sufferer of Onset Rigors Disease, a neurological condition seemingly caused by eating a popular savoury snack. ORD stiffens the joints and causes a mental deterioration which leads to increased aggression and occasional cannibalism, prompting small gangs of vigilantes to hunt down stray patients and batter them to death on the grounds that they are indistinguishable from zombies. Harold's case progresses more slowly than the norm and he remains lucid, even staving off the stiffness thanks to the therapeutic ministrations of Penny Rudge, a young nurse who becomes fond of him. Dr Norbert Shuttleworth visits Harold to ask if he will subject himself to tests in the hope of finding a cure, but the pensioner is reluctant to undergo more painful and humiliating treatments. He does accept an experimental drug, which seems to cure all his physical symptoms – though a side effect is the seeming onset of the dementia he has so far avoided. Penny takes Harold on a last picnic, to the spot where he proposed to his late wife, and he saves her from an attack by another ORD case. Vigilantes attack and kill Harold. Shuttleworth announces that he has found a cure.



Lira and Matteo Zingales's brooding score is a perfect fit. The film doesn't completely gel but it's a restrained, atmospheric and provocative thriller, with a fine performance from Dafoe.

♦♦ Matthew Taylor

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Vincent Sheehan  
**Screenplay**  
Alice Addison  
Based on the novel  
by Julia Leigh  
Original adaptation  
by Wain Fimeri,  
Daniel Nettheim  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Robert Humphreys  
**Editor**  
Roland Gallois  
**Production Designer**  
Steven Jones-Evans  
**Original Score**  
Matteo Zingales  
Michael Lira  
Andrew Lancaster  
**Sound Designers**  
Sam Petty  
Liam Egan  
**Costume Designer**  
Emily Seresin

©Porchlight Films  
Pty Limited, Screen  
Australia, Screen NSW,  
Tasmania Development  
& Resources and Nude  
Run Pty Limited  
**Production**  
**Companies**  
Magnolia Pictures,  
Screen Australia in  
association with Screen  
NSW, Screen Tasmania,  
Fulcrum Media  
Finance, Madman  
Entertainment  
& Entertainment  
One present  
**Executive Producers**  
Liz Watts  
Anita Sheehan  
Paul Wiegard

## CAST

**Willem Dafoe**  
Martin David  
**Frances O'Connor**  
Lucy  
**Sam Neill**  
Jack  
**Morgana Davies**  
Sass  
**Finn Woodlock**  
Bike  
**Jacek Koman**  
middleman  
**Callan Mulvey**  
rival hunter  
**John Brumpton**  
publican  
**Dan Wyllie**  
pool player  
**Sullivan Stapleton**  
Doug  
**Jamie Timony**  
Free  
**Dan Spielman**  
Simon

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Artificial Eye Film  
Company

**9,141 ft +0 frames**

**SYNOPSIS** The present. Mercenary Martin David is hired by biotech corporation Red Leaf to hunt and obtain DNA samples from the supposedly extinct Tasmanian tiger, following reports of local sightings. In Tasmania, Martin poses as a university scientist and lodges with bereft single mother Lucy and her children, Sass and Bike. Lucy's eco-warrior husband Jarrah is missing, having disappeared months before in the mountains – the tiger's traditional habitat. Martin encounters hostility from unemployed locals, who are angry at the measures taken by Jarrah's 'greenies' to block logging in the forests. After realising that Bike's drawings point to the tiger's location, Martin finds evidence of its presence in a cave. The locals interrupt a party at Lucy's house and violently threaten the eco-activists. As Lucy and the family grow more dependent on Martin, Red Leaf has doubts over his focus on the job. Martin finds Jarrah's remains, along with evidence that he was also working for Red Leaf. Lucy confides that Jarrah was operating covertly, intending to protect the tiger. Red Leaf sends a replacement agent, but he is killed by Martin. Lucy and Sass perish in a house fire; Bike is taken into care. Martin shoots the tiger and disposes of its ashes in the mountains. He informs Red Leaf that what it wants is now gone forever. Martin visits Bike.



Martial lore: Bruce Lee

## I Am Bruce Lee

Canada 2012

Director: Pete McCormack

Certificate 15 94m 5s

Calling this documentary *I Am Bruce Lee* raises odd expectations. The latest of many attempts to address its tragically shortlived subject, it draws heavily on a relatively in-depth interview Lee gave on an English-language Hong Kong chat show (*The Pierre Berton Show*) in 1971, but doesn't really present Lee's own version of his story. Unusually for what seems to be a family-authorised project, it even demystifies Lee's status as a writer/philosopher, with several informed folks picking apart his published texts and noting that they cobble together passages from many other sources, just as his particular 'styleless' fighting style – Jeet Kune Do, 'the way of the intercepting fist', which developed from Lee's schooling in classical Wing Chun – incorporates elements of other Asian martial arts and aspects (especially footwork) of western boxing and fencing while subliminally drawing on one of Lee's less-remembered achievements as Hong Kong's cha-cha dance champion of 1959.

Lee's wife Linda and daughter Shannon appear, along with long-time associates Gene LeBell and Dan Inosanto, to offer personal accounts of his life (and death), some of which have a print-legend feel. It has always been hard to reconcile Lee's account of himself as a teenage street fighter despatched from Hong Kong to San Francisco (where he was born) to get him away from trouble caused by his status as a child star in the Far East. Only the tiniest snippet is shown from the 20 or so popular movies he made under the name Lee Siu Lung between 1941, when he appeared in his first film as a baby, and 1960, in order to get to his more combative stature in America – as proprietor of a chain of fighting schools, co-star of the *Green Hornet* TV series and martial-arts trainer to celebrities including Steve McQueen and James Coburn – and his international film career in the 1970s (in Chinese-made films like *The Big Boss* and the Hollywood production *Enter the Dragon*). Filmmaker Reginald Hudlin and Black Eyed Pea Taboo talk a little about the impact of Lee's star vehicles, especially their significance in presenting an ethnic action hero (Lee, a quarter Caucasian, had to cope with racism from Asians as well as westerners), but most

of the participants are more interested in the fighting than the filming.

If this movie has a thesis, it's that Lee's style was the forerunner of Mixed Martial Arts (the brand of fighting featured in *Redbelt* and *Warrior*), though Gene LeBell, glimpsed taking a licking from Lee in an old *Green Hornet* episode, claims that if Lee is the father of MMA then he's the grandfather. Opinions differ on whether Lee could have held his own against Muhammad Ali, subject of director Pete McCormack's earlier *Facing Ali* (2009): he studied films of Ali's fights, purportedly in preparation for the possibility of eventually having to fight the boxer – or any skilled MMA fighter who greatly outweighed him.

In the 1988 blaxploitation parody *I'm Gonna Git You Sucka*, Steve James plays a martial artist who copies Lee's mannerisms; holding an icon of the star, he claims to be out to avenge the death of his teacher. The hero asks, "Bruce Lee was your kung-fu teacher?" and James responds, "No, acting." In the end, Lee's stardom was about the presentation of his skills in an entertaining, culturally significant manner, not the playground game of whether he could actually have beaten, say, Chuck Norris (whom he trounced onscreen in *Game of Death*, as seen here).

♦♦ Kim Newman

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Derik Murray  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Ian Kerr  
**Edited by**  
Tony Kent  
**Art Direction**  
Derik Murray  
**Music**  
Schaun Tozer  
**Sound Design/Mix**  
Chris McIntosh

©Network Films  
Two Inc.  
**Production**  
**Companies**  
Network Entertainment  
and Spike TV present  
in association with  
Leeway Media  
Group and Bruce  
Lee Enterprises  
With the assistance  
of The Canadian Film  
or Video Production

Tax Credit  
With the participation  
of The Province of  
British Columbia  
Film Incentive BC  
A Derik Murray  
production  
**Executive Producers**  
Paul Gertz  
Kent Wingerak  
Derik Murray  
Shannon Lee  
Christopher Martello  
Brian J. Diamond

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Freemantle Media  
Enterprises

**8,467 ft +8 frames**

**SYNOPSIS** A documentary about the life and work of the martial artist and actor Bruce Lee (1940-73), covering his career as a performer, teacher and fighter in America and Asia.

## In Your Hands

France 2010

Director: Lola Doillon

Certificate 15 80m 54s

Lola Doillon's feature has many of the hallmarks of the contemporary French psychological thriller: it moves, to the sound of glitch electro, between a gritty suburban location and an elegant Parisian apartment; it features a rumpled, world-worn cop; it coolly explores the full Freudian spectrum of adult sexuality; and it features an immaculate performance by Kristin Scott Thomas, who commands 98 per cent of the screen time. While British films such as *Salmon Fishing in the Yemen* continue to underutilise Scott Thomas by offering her roles narrowed to the caricature of upper-class Englishness that she was already satirising when she played Fiona in *Four Weddings and a Funeral* in 1994, *In Your Hands*, like fellow French films *I've Loved You So Long* (2008) and *Leaving* (2009), recognises and demands her unique combination of cerebral and physical intelligence, which is matched here by the writing, direction and style.

Scott Thomas's elegantly undemonstrative yet almost choreographic physical range is central to her performance as Anna Cooper, an obs-and-gynae surgeon kidnapped by Yann, who has been rendered psychotic by grief since his wife died during a caesarean performed by Anna. Scott Thomas conveys both Anna's surgical self-confidence and its gradual, jagged dissolution in the hostage situation without ever being 'icy' (an accusation frequently levelled at her in British journalism). Where the film moves beyond the patterns of the *policier* is in its resistance to the idea of the victim and taking out their suffering on the audience with exploitative shocks. Given that we witness Anna's escape from the hostage house at the start of the film, the intrigue that compels is not structured on the logic of torture porn but rather on the complex interplay of Anna and Yann's subtle adjustments in status as they are increasingly, and interlockingly, in each other's hands: this is the centre of the film, and as soon as Anna leaves, it loses tension and focus.

The abduction sets up a uniquely unsettling two-hander between Anna and Yann, a series of confrontations that circle, verbally and gesturally, around issues of responsibility, without ever feeling theatrical or dogmatic in the manner of David Mamet's *Oleanna* (1994). Yann accuses Anna of failing in her responsibility, not only because of his wife's death but also because she didn't attend the subsequent malpractice trial (in which she was exonerated). Anna initially responds with scientific rationality, but gradually sees the unexpressed, and unexpressable, grief behind Yann's violent facade as – locked into the logic of the hostage situation – he has to care for her. This being a French film, the Freudian schema is almost nakedly apparent: Anna (whose business is motherhood) stands in for Yann's lost wife, the object of his melancholia, but also for the mother that his wife would





**Captive mind:** Kristin Scott Thomas

have been to their daughter, whom he has abandoned to his own mother. His rage against Anna's surgical failure is, really, the son's against the mother who fails to offer the plenitude of the perfect dyad: the mother-lover who turns away from the child to the father (here represented by the long arm of the law), according to psychoanalysis.

In turn, Yann, discovering that Anna is childless, suggests that she is lonely and lacking, and she is moved by his childlike need of her to become the mother-lover. Both the film and the characters pull back from fulfilling this dyad within the hostage situation, but after her escape Anna obsessively seeks Yann out in order to fulfil their

seemingly inevitable sexual destiny (and Yann's fantasy). When Anna sees Yann's car outside her apartment building, it's because her attention has been cued by the sound of a child crying on the other side of the street. Yet both Anna and the film are seduced into sex, which is filmed as erotic. Repelled and trapped by her solution to her guilt and Yann's immature need, she runs to the police (papa) but can't prevent herself from trying to warn Yann. Their final exchange of glances suggests that neither Anna nor the film (however intelligent, stylish and superbly acted) has found a satisfactory closure to the impossibility of the mother-son bond.

◆◆ **Sophie Mayer**

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Saga Blanchard  
**Director of Photography**  
Mathieu Vadepied  
**Editor**  
Marie Da Costa  
**Art Directors**  
Stéphanie Guitard  
Stanislas Reydellet  
**Original Music**  
Chkrrr  
Sandra Moubarak  
Anthony Leroy  
Dominique Leroy  
**Sound Engineer**  
Laurent Poirier  
**Costume Designer**

Mic Cherminal  
©Origami Films, Ce qui me meurt, Mars Films, Papaye  
**Production Companies**  
Origami Films and Ce qui me meurt present in co-production with Mars Films  
With the participation of Canal+, Cinécinéma and ARD Degeto, La Banque Postale, Image 3 and Sofica Soficinéma 5  
With the support

of Région Poitou-Charentes and Département de la Charente

## CAST

**Kristin Scott Thomas**  
Anna Cooper  
**Pio Marmaï**  
Yann  
**Jean-Philippe Ecoffey**  
policeman taking statement  
**Marie-Sohna Condé**  
Caroline  
**Vinciane Millereau**  
Milène  
**Marie-Christine Orry**

concierger  
**Sophie Fougère**  
emergency police  
**Jean-Louis Tribes**  
Michel

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
**[1.85:1]**  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Artificial Eye Film Company

**7.281 ft +0 frames**

French theatrical title  
**Contre toi**

# Lay the Favourite

USA/France/United Kingdom 2012

Director: Stephen Frears

We first meet Beth Raymer (Rebecca Hall) standing upside-down in a hotel room dressed only in her underwear, taking instructions from a polite middle-aged client. Cut to her next assignment as a 'private dancer', and she's in an altogether seedier trailer, with a john creepily brandishing a pistol over her head. Clearly it is time for this bubbly yet ambitious young woman to move on. "I want stimulation, I want money, I want a change of scenery," she explains to her father Jerry (Corbin Bernsen). "I want to move to Las Vegas and become a cocktail waitress!" "Goddamn!" Jerry replies. "Goddamn, that is a great idea!"

The only way is up for white-trash sex worker Beth – yet those opening scenes also economically sketch a woman who remains a wide-eyed little girl, constantly seeking instructions and approval from daddy or any other father figure. In Las Vegas, she inevitably gravitates into the orbit of another older man, the depressive professional gambler Dink Heimowitz (Bruce Willis), who offers her the paternal guidance she so craves but also recognises her untapped potential for the betting business. When their professional relationship risks becoming something more, Dink's wife Tulip (Catherine Zeta-Jones) swiftly intervenes – but once Beth has been carefully reconfigured as the daughter that Dink and Tulip never had, she's able to go out into the world, find her feet and assume independence as a confident, solvent woman, all with her adoptive parents' blessing. Now she can get a college education, and write her memoirs.

The script for Stephen Frears's *Lay the Favourite* has been drawn from the real Beth Raymer's memoirs by screenwriter D.V. DeVincentis (who previously helped adapt *High Fidelity* for Frears), but

he appears to have hedged his bets in forming the narrative, resulting in mixed messages and a certain incoherence. The considerable amount of exposition apportioned to the complex mechanics of Dink's gambling operation (in which potential winnings are bolstered through the systematic manipulation of odds) seems to be setting up a convoluted long-con plot, as in Frears's *The Grifters* (1990); but all this information turns out to be there purely for its own sake, as a didactic (and ultimately irrelevant) exposé of the workings of high-end sports gambling, and is entirely abandoned in the climactic sequence where blind chance is preferred to rationalised betting schemes.

The closing sequence also undermines the film's careful thematic exploration of the psychological relationship between luck and responsibility by loading the dice too much in favour of feelgood fantasy. When everyone ends up winning – and winning merely by the vagaries of fortune – a more nuanced message about the science of betting becomes lost to sentiment. "I deserve this," is the only reason Beth gives for her certainty that the odds will be in her favour – but her words are neither true nor so different from what many high-stakes gamblers blindly believe, making her subsequent victory merely an unsatisfyingly arbitrary affirmation of wish-fulfilment.

The film's strongest suit is as a coming-of-age, rags-to-riches tale in which the upwardly mobile trajectory of the American Dream is writ large in self-realisation (and wads of transferred cash), with Beth's extended family in the end assembling not so much to resolve her problems for her as to support her in helping herself to financial independence and a settled life. Meanwhile the funniest moments belong to New York bookmaker Rosie (Vince Vaughn), a character entirely invented by DeVincentis, but his larger-than-life absurdity sits incongruously with everything and everyone else. The cast here are on fine form, but must play long odds against a desultory script. ◆◆ **Anton Bitel**



**Flush with success:** Rebecca Hall, Bruce Willis

**SYNOPSIS** Paris, the present. A distressed woman leaves an anonymous suburban house and finds her way to a petrol station. Returning to her own apartment by taxi, she picks up a series of cellphone messages that reveal her to be Anna Cooper, a surgeon whose family and colleagues are concerned that she has overstayed her holiday. Unable to sleep and panicked by silent phone calls, Anna goes to the police, revealing that she was abducted at the start of her holiday. Her abductor, Yann, is the widower of a former patient who died during a caesarean.

In flashback we see that Anna bravely refuses to be broken by Yann's random cruelties, but is eventually moved by his grief and his attempts at decency. Anna's eventual sincere apology provokes sexual desire that neither of them can handle.

Following her escape Anna fails to file a report with the police, and attempts to track Yann down herself, leading to a consummation of their desire. This time Anna presses the police to make an arrest, but her attempt to prevent it when the time comes betrays her unfinished entanglement with Yann.



## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Anthony Bregman  
Randall Emmett  
George Furla  
D.V. DeVicentis  
Paul Tribjits  
**Screenplay**  
D.V. DeVicentis  
Based on the book  
*Lay the Favorite: A  
Memoir of Gambling*  
by Beth Raymer  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Michael McDonough  
**Film Editor**  
Mick Audsley  
**Production Designer**  
Dan Davis  
**Music Composed by**  
James Seymour Brett  
**Sound Mixer**  
Mark Ulano  
**Costume Designer**  
Christopher Peterson

@Take the Dog LLC  
**Production  
Companies**  
An Emmett/Furla  
Films and Wild Bunch  
presentation  
A Likely Story-Emmett/  
Furla Films production  
A Ruby Films  
production  
In association with  
Jackson Investment  
Group and Lipsync,  
Random House Films  
A Stephen Frears film  
**Executive Producers**  
Agnès Mentré  
Vincent Maraval  
James W.  
Skotchdopole  
Richard Jackson  
Curtis Jackson

Brandt Anderson  
Brandon Grimes  
Anthony Gudas  
Michael Corso  
Peter Hampden  
James Gibb

## CAST

**Bruce Willis**  
Dink  
**Rebecca Hall**  
Beth Raymer  
**Catherine Zeta-Jones**  
Tulip  
**Joshua Jackson**  
Jeremy  
**Joel Murray**  
Darren  
**Hugo Armstrong**  
customer  
**Corbin Bernsen**  
Jerry  
**Earl Maddox**  
manager  
**Rio Hackford**  
Magic  
**Jo Newman**  
Darcy  
**Laura Prepon**  
Holly  
**Frank Grillo**  
Frankie  
**John Carroll Lynch**  
Dave Greenberg

**Dolby Digital/  
Datasat/SDDS  
In Colour  
[1.85:1]**

**Distributor**  
E! Films

**SYNOPSIS** Tallahassee, Florida, the present. Ambitious yet wide-eyed private dancer Beth sets her sights on becoming a cocktail waitress and moves to Las Vegas, where she is instead employed, despite her inexperience, by older, married professional gambler Dink. Beth takes to the work – and also to her new boss, until Dink, at the request of his watchful wife Tulip, fires her. Lovelorn Beth meets journalist Jeremy, and is about to drive off with him to a new life in New York when Dink, now in a slump, asks her to come back to work for him on a strictly professional basis, with Tulip's blessing. But as Dink blames everyone else for his losing streak, Beth reluctantly leaves.

Living in New York with Jeremy, Beth brings back gambler Dave Greenberg and his friends to illegal bookmaker Rosie, who hires her on the spot. Leaving Jeremy to run Greenberg's book, Beth joins Rosie's new legitimate gambling business on Curaçao, fast realising how unprofessional Rosie is compared to Dink. When Greenberg refuses to pay a \$75,000 debt and threatens to bring Beth and Jeremy before the federal authorities, Rosie abandons Beth. With Dink and Tulip's help, Beth makes a deal with Greenberg to gamble \$40,000 more on a basketball game, with the potential \$80,000 winnings going to her. Dink also takes out his own private \$70,000 bet with Rosie on the same game. The team wins.

Beth marries Jeremy, goes to college and becomes a writer.

## LOL

**USA 2011**

**Director: Liza Azuelos**

**Certificate 12A 96m 39s**

Translating a French teen comedy to mainstream American soil is a tough job, if this feature from the original's director Lisa Azuelos is anything to go by. Gone are the jokes about threesomes, in comes the Disney actress (Miley Cyrus), and virtually no one is Laughing Out Loud, the subhead this remake wisely dropped in most territories.

'LOL', we are told, stands for our heroine Lola as well as 'lots of love', Lola's signoff of her final diary entry. With the narrative climax revolving around a mother discovering that her teenage daughter smokes pot and has slept with a boy, the dramatic impact is as tame as its comedy.

None of this might matter if *LOL* had

a firm grasp of American teen speak, but much of the dialogue is translated word for word from the French hit, and especially fails to convince given a lacklustre performance from Cyrus. In its narration, *LOL* does succeed in replicating the experience of reading the diary of a needlessly tortured teen, but without a note of cynicism or insight it's a gruellingly superficial experience.

Narratively narrow, the film focuses on Lola's relationship with textbook dreamboat Kyle (Douglas Booth) and her loving, concerned single mother Anne (Demi Moore). The narration's conclusion that Lola and Anne are not so different is scarcely required when the film has been cutting between scenes of them both smoking pot and having sex. Putting the French and American films side by side might have a similar effect to comparing this mother and daughter: there are likenesses on paper but one is older, wiser and considerably less irritating.

♦♦ Anna Smith

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Michael Sharnberg  
Stacey Sher  
Tish Cyrus  
**Screenplay**  
Lisa Azuelos  
Kamir Ainouz  
Based on the film *LOL*  
(Laughing Out Loud)  
**Director of  
Photography**  
Kieran McGuigan  
**Editor**  
Myron Kerstein  
**Production Designer**  
Happy Massee  
**Music**

Rob Simonsen  
**Sound Mixer**  
Thomas Varga  
**Costume Designer**  
Hope Hanafin

@LOL Productions, LLC  
**Production  
Companies**  
Mandate Pictures  
presents a Double  
Feature Films  
production  
A Lisa Azuelos film  
**Executive Producers**  
Nathan Kahane  
Jerome Seydoux  
Romain Legrand  
Lisa Azuelos

## CAST

**Miley Cyrus**  
Lola  
**Demi Moore**  
Anne  
**Ashley Greene**  
Ashley  
**Adam Sevani**  
Wen  
**Thomas Jane**  
Allen  
**Jay Hernandez**  
James  
**Marlo Thomas**  
Gran  
**Nora Dunn**  
Emily's mother  
**Gina Gershon**

Kathy  
**Fisher Stevens**  
Roman  
**George Finn**  
Chad  
**Douglas Booth**  
Kyle

**Dolby Digital/DTS  
In Colour  
[2.35:1]**

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

**8,698 ft +8 frames**



**Lost in translation: Miley Cyrus**

**SYNOPSIS** Chicago, the present. Teenager Lola narrates. At the start of a new school year, Lola's boyfriend Chad tells her that he hooked up with someone else over the summer; Lola lies and tells him she did the same. They split up. Lola spends time with Kyle, a schoolmate and budding musician who is preparing for a Battle of the Bands contest, much to his father's disapproval. Meanwhile Lola discovers that her mother Anne is secretly dating Lola's father, with whom she had split. Lola throws a party and gets together with Kyle. Anne discovers that Lola's father is seeing someone else; she meets police detective James.

James gives a talk about the dangers of drugs at Lola's school. He asks Anne out on a date, and they begin a relationship. Lola mistakenly believes that Kyle and schoolmate Ashley had a sexual encounter and splits with Kyle. However, she discovers her mistake and reunites with Kyle. They go on a school trip to the outskirts of Paris, where Lola loses her virginity to Kyle.

On Lola's return, Anne finds Lola's diary and discovers that she's been smoking pot and sleeping with Kyle. Anne and Lola argue; Lola moves in with her father for a while, before reuniting with her mother. Kyle sneaks out to the Battle of the Bands contest and is followed by his angry father, who is quickly impressed with Kyle's musicianship. Lola concludes that she and her mother are not so different after all.

## Magic Mike

**USA 2012**

**Director: Steven Soderbergh**

**Certificate 15 110m 12s**

The sex-industry ingénue plot is a bit of a no-brainer for Hollywood, which loves to titillate and moralise simultaneously. The genre has yielded plenty of thoughtful meditations on exploitation: think of Paul Thomas Anderson's *Boogie Nights* (1997) or James Cox's ultra-dark *Wonderland* (2003). But Steven Soderbergh's comic contribution to this well-trodden genre isn't interested in darkness; this is a film about strippers having a really smashing time, and on that level it's a likeable exercise in don't-take-yourself-so-seriously.

Of course it always helps when the ingénue is a boy, since grooming girls for stripping might not be considered quite such... *fun*. But boys are fine! Isn't it every young lad's dream to rip off his Velcro trousers and dry-hump screeching hen-night drunkards for tips? Or if it's not that bit *exactly* that's the great part, well at least you have a lot of sex and the money is easy. Anyway the pretty boy in question here, Adam (Alex Pettyfer), doesn't hesitate when he's offered a place in the stripper troupe headed by 'Magic' Mike (Channing Tatum) in a seedy Tampa Bay nitespot. For thirtysomething Mike, though, the lifestyle is starting to pall just a little. His longing for domesticity is manifested by a passion for designer furniture and a crush on Adam's tutting sister Zora (Riley Keough), who can't help feeling that something's wrong with this picture when she sees little bro writhing around in a G-string stuffed with dollar bills or unconscious in a pool of vomit with a pig licking his face. On the other hand, Mike she finds quite nice, quite responsible and sensitive and oh look he's taken off his clothes again, wow, great six-pack.

Let's face it, 'oh look he's taken off his clothes again' is pretty much the default setting here, a fact that tends to emphasise the film's featherlight, episodic nature, and is disappointing from a director whose films are usually masterclasses in narrative momentum. In between the bouts of pelvic thrusting there are vignettes that show either Adam getting more debauched or Mike getting more wistful. The best scenes are the comedy episodes, with Tatum twinkling and wisecracking his way past the defences of Keough's slowly melting ice-queen or steering Pettyfer through a sex-prop shop full of mind-boggling spandex creations. The endless stripping scenes are, by contrast, a bit too earnest: avoiding the sexual-bathos shtick owned by titting British offerings like *The Full Monty* (1997), this production instead tries to make its boys the Best Strippers Ever. As the opening bars of 'It's Raining Men' start up again and crotch-grabs begin, you might be left wondering why, if you wanted to get drunk and see a sex show, you're actually sitting in a cinema, stone cold sober.

♦♦ Lisa Mullen





Full frontal: Matt Bomer

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Nick Wechsler  
Gregory Jacobs  
Channing Tatum  
Reid Carolin  
**Written by**  
Reid Carolin  
**Director of Photography**  
Peter Andrews  
[i.e. Steven Soderbergh]  
**Edited by**  
Mary Ann Bernard  
[i.e. Steven Soderbergh]  
**Production Design**  
Howard Cummings  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Dennis Towns  
**Costume Design**  
Christopher Peterson

©The Estate of Redmond Barry LLC  
**Production Companies**  
Warner Bros.  
Pictures presents a Nick Wechsler/ Gregory Jacobs production of an Iron Horse/Extension 765 Enterprise

## CAST

**Channing Tatum**  
Mike, 'Magic Mike'  
**Alex Pettyfer**  
Adam, 'The Kid'  
**Matthew McConaughey**  
Dallas  
**Cody Horn**  
Brooke  
**Olivia Munn**  
Joanna  
**Matt Bomer**  
Ken  
**Riley Keough**  
Nora  
**Joe Manganiello**  
Big Dick Richie  
**Kevin Nash**  
Tarzan  
**Adam Rodriguez**  
Tito  
**Gabriel Iglesias**  
Tobias

**Dolby Digital/Datasat In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Lionsgate UK

9,918 ft +0 frames

**SYNOPSIS** Tampa Bay, Florida, present day. Nineteen-year-old slacker Adam hates work, so he's penniless and sleeping on his sister Nora's couch – until he meets thirtysomething male stripper Mike and joins his troupe. Mike, however, is restless; he feels exploited by the strip-club owner Dallas, is tired of being treated as a sex object, and dreams of starting his own business making bespoke furniture. Meanwhile he's also falling for the disapproving Nora, who grudgingly likes him but hates her brother's new career and blames Mike for getting him into it.

When Adam starts taking and selling drugs, he soon owes big money to some dangerous dealers. Mike uses his hard-earned furniture start-up fund to pay off Adam's debts. With Dallas about to relocate the club to Miami, Mike has to make a decision about his future: he walks out of the club and knocks on Nora's door. Satisfied that he's turned over a new leaf, she finally agrees to go out with him.

# Marina Abramovic The Artist Is Present

USA 2012

Director: Matthew Akers

Certificate 15 105m 56s

Forget the Avengers, Spider-Man or Batman – cinema's superhero of the summer is a 64-year-old female Serbian artist-warrior practised in all manner of body-endurance feats, clothed neck to toe in a red sculptural ensemble and equipped with a killer stare. Known for her gruelling, intimate and self-destructive spectacles, Marina Abramovic has been fighting the cause of performance art ever since she embarked on 'Rhythm 10' (which involved a knife and the space between her fingers) back in 1973. While Abramovic is now a giant within the art world, her chosen artform – so confrontational and fleeting – is still peripheral and maligned in the eyes of the wider public.

Aiming to combat this, Matthew Akers's documentary records the 2010 Abramovic retrospective at New York's Museum of Modern Art and acts very much as a moving-image catalogue, enabling those who couldn't visit the exhibition to experience the live restagings of the artist's key works by a troupe of young performers (a clever means that Abramovic has pioneered to give her art longevity). Reflections from curators and writers provide a solid and thoughtful introduction to Abramovic's work, while Akers surveys her career using photographs and film footage, illustrating shocking experiments into human behaviour such as 'Rhythm 0' (in which for seven hours observers could use any number of weapons on a naked Abramovic if they so chose) but also poetic, epic performances, as when she and her 12-year collaborator and husband Ulay marked the schism in their relationship by walking towards each other from opposite ends of the Great Wall of China.

Some artists, such as Picasso and Pollock, are at ease in front of the camera while others shy away (Anselm Kiefer in Sophie Fiennes's 2010 *Over Your Cities Grass Will Grow*). As an artist who has often surrendered any sense of privacy (openly living and fasting for 12 days in a New York gallery in 2002, for instance), Abramovic is unsurprisingly in the former category. Here, giving Akers access all areas, she is more than willing to cry and vomit on screen, and delve into her unhappy childhood in Belgrade and her relationship with Ulay (who turns out to be the film's most provocative interviewee). Often Akers's film runs on Abramovic's charisma alone. Not only is she intelligent, candid and larger than life, she brings with her a sense of humour that's often missing from artist docs.

Given the intimate video-diary-esque nature of the film, insight into Abramovic's creative process is also fortunately forthcoming. Some of the most fascinating scenes document the

demanding workshops that she held with her young performers, preparing them to attain the necessary state of mind to restage her artworks. We also watch her poring over the details of her new solo performance – for which she sat totally immobile throughout the 716 hours and 30 minutes of the exhibition (during MoMA's opening hours), inviting audience members to sit opposite her one by one and meet her gaze. Akers often seems rather too absorbed, though, by the effects of the arduous performance on the artist herself, and there's little serious interrogation of her work. Abramovic's choice of lithe young bodies to re-enact her performances goes unquestioned, as does her embrace of western consumerism (which she initially used passivity to rally against). It's up to gallerist Sean Kelly to provide some degree of critical heft – when Abramovic tells him of her desire to work with illusionist David Blaine, Kelly tersely and intelligently illuminates the pitfalls of doing so.

With his uplifting soundtrack and plentiful shots of tearful sitters, Akers seems more intent on presenting Abramovic's performance as a transcendent stare contest. The actual experience of sitting opposite her sadly never quite translates onto the big screen. **Isabel Stevens**



Stare wars: Marina Abramovic

## CREDITS

**Co-directed by**  
Jeff Dupre  
**Produced by**  
Jeff Dupre  
Maro Chermayeff  
**Director of Photography**  
Matthew Akers  
**Edited by**  
E. Donna Shepherd  
**Music**  
Nathan Halpern  
**Sound Recordists**  
Marcus Ricci  
Richard Fleming

©Show of Force

LLC and Mudpuppy Films Inc.  
**Production Companies**  
HBO Documentary Films, Submarine DeLuxe, A Show of Force  
**Executive Producer**  
for HBO:  
Sheila Nevins

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Dogwoof

9,534 ft +0 frames

**SYNOPSIS** A documentary following Serbian performance artist Marina Abramovic as she prepares for her 2010 retrospective at the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Art-world authorities pay tribute to the artist, as does her ex-husband and former collaborator Ulay. Abramovic leads workshops with the young performers who will re-enact her key works in MoMA's galleries. She also readies herself for a new performance which involves sitting totally still during the museum's opening hours while members of the public sit opposite her and meet her stare. The film documents reactions to the show and the effect the performance has on Abramovic.

# Nostalgia for the Light

France/Germany/Chile/USA 2010

Director: Patricio Guzmán

Certificate 12A 93m 37s

Since the *Battle of Chile* trilogy (1975-79), Patricio Guzmán's only real concern as a filmmaker has been the nightmare of late-20th-century Chilean politics: the military coup which ousted Salvador Allende in 1973, provoking his suicide and ushering in the fascist rule of General Augusto Pinochet, noted for imprisoning, torturing and executing his enemies without trial. The septuagenarian Guzmán is nowadays based mainly in France where, like many, he fails to keep his website up to date; he has occasionally ventured beyond political protest (his last film before this was an hour-long essay on Jules Verne made for Arte in 2005, which chimes with the mention of a youthful passion for sci-fi in the preamble here) but *Nostalgia for the Light* returns him to the issue which has dominated his life since 1973.

If Guzmán's fixation on Pinochet's crimes remains unwavering, at least his cinematic and philosophical frames of reference have expanded. *Nostalgia for the Light* is neither agit-prop nor reportage but what the Germans call a *Trauerarbeit*, a piece of work born of infinite sadness. It examines the terrain of Chile's Atacama Desert, said to be the driest place on earth, home to both pre-Columbian relics (the llama-herders who once traversed the region left rock carvings) and present-day astronomers and physicists who seek to map the origins of the universe through deep-space telescopes. The desert was also the place where Pinochet buried the bodies. Political prisoners were held in a former mining camp ("Pinochet just added the barbed wire," notes Guzmán wryly) and once they'd been summarily executed their bodies were dumped in mass graves. Later, to prevent the corpses from being used in evidence against the army, they were bulldozed to the surface and scattered, some into the Pacific. Organised teams (mostly women relatives of the deceased) dug in the desert for human remains until 2002, and a few individuals are still unearthing shards of bone and mummified body parts to this day.

Guzmán starts with the telescopes – the opening sequence shows their wheels and cogs ratcheting them into position, with no visible human agency – and uses deep-space research to provide the film's governing metaphor. Gaspar Galaz, George Preston and other astronomers explain that scanning the distant universe is, in essence, a kind of archaeology: the cosmic events they are looking at happened billions of years ago. Guzmán suggests a parallel between their work and his own quest, shared with a diminishing band of bereaved relatives of 'the disappeared', to reactivate memories of the atrocities carried out under Pinochet's rule. Believing that "memory has a gravitational force, constantly attracting us", he argues that only those who do remember are able to live in "the fragile present moment".



**■ FACULTY OF ARTS & SOCIAL SCIENCES**

A photograph of three closed beach umbrellas on a sandy beach. The umbrellas are arranged in a row, receding into the distance. The largest umbrella in the foreground is red with a blue fabric draped over its base. The middle umbrella is blue with a red fabric draped over its base. The smallest umbrella in the background is blue with a red fabric draped over its base. The beach is a uniform light tan color, and the sky is a clear, pale blue. A small, dark object is visible on the horizon line to the right.

## A man in a dark suit, white shirt, and striped tie is waving his right hand. He is standing on a red carpet. In the background, there are stage lights on a metal truss, a white tent, and a building with a sign that says "NATIONAL FILM FESTIVAL". Other people are visible in the background. The sky is clear and blue.

CITYJET



[www.normandy-tourism.org](http://www.normandy-tourism.org)



➔ Trouble is, the metaphor doesn't stand up. Where a filmmaker like the BBC's Adam Curtis (*The Power of Nightmares*, *All Watched Over by Machines of Loving Grace*) looks for metaphors and models from science which reveal hidden truths about social, moral and political decisions, Guzmán demonstrates only that looking at the crimes of a military dictatorship in a cosmic context illuminates nothing about either the crimes or our memory of them. The film's throwaway suggestion that Chile has a chronic tendency to 'forget' past embarrassments – including the treatment of native peoples and the exploitation of workers – compounds the problem. The only thing which connects the telescopes and the crimes against humanity is the Atacama Desert itself. Guzmán coaxes supportive quotes from several of his interviewees: for example the observation that the calcium found in the recovered bones is a universal element, also found in distant galaxies. But no amount of conceptual grandstanding makes the film's metaphor cohere.

If we set aside the astronomy, along with the thin strain of autobiographical reminiscence which bookends the film, *Nostalgia* offers a very decent account of the last gasps of the movement protesting against Pinochet's atrocities. Worth doing, skilfully engineered, beautiful in a sub-Herzog way, but essentially moribund.

♦♦ Tony Rayns

## CREDITS

### Produced by

Renate Sachse

### Written by

Patricio Guzmán

### Photography and Camera

Katell Djian

### Editors

Patricio Guzmán

Emmanuelle Joly

### Original Music

Miranda y Tobar

### Sound Recordist

Freddy González

©Atacama Productions, Blinker Filmproduktion, WDR, Cronomedia

### Production Companies

Atacama Productions present an Atacama Productions S.A.R.L., Blinker Filmproduktion GmbH, WDR, Cronomedia Ltda co-production With contributions from Fonds Sud Cinéma, Ministère de la Culture

et Communication CNC, Ministère des Affaires Étrangères et Européennes de France, Région Île-de-France and with the participation of Televisión Española TVE With contributions from Bourse d'aide à l'écriture Brouillon d'un Rêve SCAM, Sundance Documentary Fund

### Dolby Digital

In Colour

[1.85:1]

### Subtitles

### Distributor

New Wave Films

8,425 ft +8 frames

French theatrical title *Nostalgie de la lumière*

**SYNOPSIS** Chile's Atacama Desert, the most arid area on earth, is the site for an array of deep-space telescopes, where astronomers and physicists search for clues to the origins of the universe. It is also the site of pre-Columbian rock carvings, and of the ruins of Chacabuco, a former mining camp turned into a concentration camp for political prisoners by General Pinochet after the military coup of 1973. The bodies of summarily executed prisoners were buried in mass graves like the one at Pisagua, then disinterred and scattered; but relatives (mainly women) continue to scour the desert for human remains.

# Personal Best

United Kingdom 2012

Director: Sam Blair

Certificate 12A 89m 18s

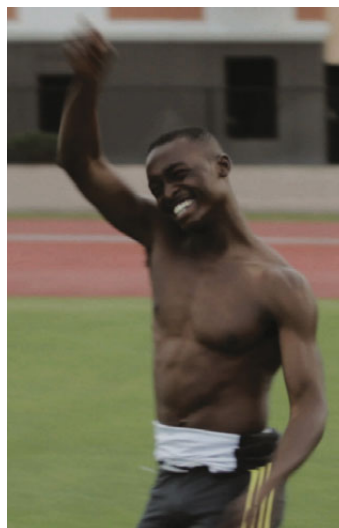
Developed by director and editor Sam Blair from *Sprinters*, his 17-minute National Film and Television MA graduation film, and dedicated to the "youth of Great Britain", *Personal Best* continues to follow the athletic efforts of the short's protagonists James Ellington, Jeanette Kwakye and Richard Alleyne, while also introducing 17-year-old aspiring sprinter Omardo Anson.

*Personal Best* is one of several Olympic-related films being given a cinematic release this summer, alongside *Ping Pong*, *Fast Girls* and the reissued *Chariots of Fire*. On a formal and intellectual level it's easily the most interesting of the batch, though bizarrely it has been criticised in some quarters for being overly serious and for focusing on what one writer has called "pain not gain" – the assumption being that audiences require more uplifting cinematic treatments of sporting endeavours. In other words one is allowed to be 'serious' if one is an arthouse auteur such as Béla Tarr or Nuri Bilge Ceylan, but woe betide a fledgling English filmmaker who dares to treat competitive running with any artistic gravitas.

Fittingly for a sport in which the difference between success and failure involves fractions of seconds, Blair's documentary is explicitly concerned with the sensation of time passing. The athletes themselves are obviously constantly seeking ways to improve their personal bests, and are simultaneously all too aware of the transience of their chosen careers, which can be ended in an instant by an unexpected injury.

Meanwhile it's not simply a case of Blair and his director of photography Jean-Louis Schuller deploying slow-motion images of the sprinters in training and in races. The filmmakers frame 'action' sequences against the austere backdrops of the indoor training facilities of the Lea Valley Athletics Club, while nocturnal shots of urban London landscapes accentuate the mood of bleakness, heightened by the melancholic ambient score by Lukid (Blair's composer brother Luke), and Gunnar Óskarsson.

Like all the most interesting films ostensibly 'about' a particular sport, *Personal Best* invites us to ponder a range of ideas and themes. It's a study of race, class and nationality – all the athletes here are young black Britons, and none comes from a materially privileged background. Omardo's mother, a nurse, talks of her regret that her son didn't "run with other opportunities" and try to become a doctor or a lawyer. James's mum regrets that he wasn't just good at running rather than outstanding, revealing how talent can sometimes be perceived as a burden as much as a blessing. (Interestingly, James himself talks about not wanting to be a "normal person"; running thus becomes an act of resistance to the expectations of wider society.) The coaches Michael Afilaka and John Powell occupy complex positions in the lives of those they train,



Born to run: Omardo Anson

acting as surrogate parents and at times stretching their athletes to the limits of physical and mental endurance.

Without overloading on biographical details, Blair succeeds in presenting an intimate portrait of his subjects. Whereas Freud wrote of regaining the "lost laughter of childhood", James et al seek to recapture, through watching videotapes of their earlier races, the times as adolescents when they ran intuitively and without fear or inhibition. In other words, to move forward they go back to their past. A follow-up film, in say another five years, would be most welcome.

♦♦ Thomas Dawson

## CREDITS

### Produced by

Jessica Levick

### Director of

Photography

Jean-Louis Schuller

### Edited by

Sam Blair

### Music

Lukid

Gunnar Óskarsson

### Supervising

Sound Editor/

Sound Designer

Gunnar Óskarsson

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Institute and One

Hundred Film

SPV Limited

### Production

Companies

BFI presents a

Magnified Pictures

production

A film by Sam Blair

Made with the support

of the BFI's Film Fund

Executive Producer

Mike Chetcuti

### In Colour

[1.78:1]

### Distributor

Verve Pictures Ltd

8,037 ft +0 frames

**SYNOPSIS** Shot between 2007 and 2011, this documentary follows various young black British athletes who are seeking to compete at national and international level. They include sprinters James Ellington, Jeanette Kwakye (a finalist at the 2008 Olympics in Beijing) and 17-year-old Omardo Anson as well as hurdler Richard Alleyne. The athletes are filmed training under coaches Michael Afilaka and John Powell, taking part in various competitions and attending warm-weather training in Florida. We also see glimpses of their lives away from sport. In July 2011, Ellington, Kwakye and Alleyne compete in the UK trials for selection for the World Championships in Daegu, South Korea.

# Ping Pong

United Kingdom 2012

Director: Hugh Hartford

Certificate PG 76m 6s

Not to be confused with 2002's similarly titled Japanese teenage melodrama set against a high-school table-tennis competition, *Ping Pong* is the workmanlike documentary feature debut of British director Hugh Hartford, whose brother Anson is credited as producer.

The first cinematic release from the Britdoc organisation, and presumably released to coincide with this summer's London Olympics, the digitally shot film sticks tightly to a tried-and-tested narrative structure. First it introduces a couple of significant characters – in this case the indefatigable 89-year-old table-tennis competitor Les D'Arcy and his 81-year-old sporting colleague Terry Donlon, who is shown undergoing treatment in a Sheffield hospital for cancer. We then cut to six months earlier and watch Les and Terry preparing for and competing in the Over 80 World Table Tennis Championship, which takes place in the Inner Mongolian city of Hohhot. Alongside the two British representatives, the film follows half a dozen other veterans playing in the same competition – these include two nonagenarian German women (Ursula Bihl and Inge Hermann); the 101-year-old Australian Dorothy DeLow; the 86-year-old former Austrian war bride and now Texas-resident Lisa Modlich; and Sweden's Rune Forsberg and China's Sun Lao, both of whom are in their mid-eighties. Crosscutting between the characters we proceed through the various rounds, all the way to the final. A postscript returns us to the beginning, providing the audience with a suitably upbeat coda.

Of course the interest here lies less in the quality of the games depicted than in the players' backstories, which are revealed in the course of various interviews and which convey the interesting ways these fiercely determined people have embraced the sport. Take the remarkable Dorothy, who began playing in her seventies following the death of both her husband and her daughter in the same year. Or Inge, who after being bereaved and suffering several strokes was placed in the dementia section of a nursing home. It was there that she taught herself to play table tennis, and she now teaches computer skills to dementia sufferers. For Ursula the game seems to be a way of dealing with her own fears of inevitable decline: she says she would prefer to "die at the table" than suffer painful paralysis.

The poetry-writing and rapping Les, who still trains with weights everyday, turns out to be an individual utterly at ease in front of the camera, just like the maverick motorcyclist Guy Martin in last year's *TT3D: Closer to the Edge*. Lisa, married to a Texan pistolero 25 years her junior, is alone in trash-talking her opponents, scathingly telling a rival that, "Your mum gave you the wrong milk when you were a baby." Yet it transpires that in her youth she was awarded the Croix de Guerre for helping to smuggle Jews out of Austria.





Table for two: Lisa Modlich

*Ping Pong* could have benefitted from trimming several of its characters and focusing more on Les and Lisa, yet it treats its subjects with compassion and respect, suggesting to the viewer that if one does reach a certain age in life, a considerable amount of one's time will be spent dealing with society's preconceptions about age-appropriate activity.

A question mark hangs, however, over whether cinema is the most appropriate medium for this type of filmmaking. Whereas, for example, the images of faraway galaxies and meditations on personal and collective memory in Patricio Guzmán's *Nostalgia for the Light*, only now getting a belated release in the UK, cry out to be seen on a cinema screen, *Ping Pong*, for all its likeability, feels better suited to home viewing.

♦♦ Thomas Dawson

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Anson Hartford  
**Filed by**  
Hugh Hartford  
Anson Hartford  
**Editor**  
John Mister  
**Original Music**  
Orlando Robertson  
**Sound**  
Daniel Chu Owen

©Banyak Films  
**Production Companies**  
Banyak Films in association with BRITDOC and Channel 4 present a Hartford Brothers film Produced in association with

BRITDOC & Channel 4, International Table Tennis Federation, English Table Tennis Association, Puma, Creative, Wellcome Trust, TVO, Knowledge Network  
**Executive Producers**  
Maxyne Franklin  
Beadie Finzi

**In Colour**  
[1.78:1]

**Distributor**  
Brit Doc Films  
**6,849 ft + 0 frames**

**SYNOPSIS** A documentary following eight players from five countries competing in the Over 80 World Table Tennis Championship in Hohhot, Inner Mongolia, in 2010. Among the competitors are Britain's 89-year-old Les D'Arcy and his 81-year-old rival Terry Donlon; Germany's Ursula Bihl and Inge Hermann, both aged 90; the 86-year-old American Lisa Modlich; Rune Forsberg of Sweden and Sun Lao from China, both in their eighties; and centenarian Australian Dorothy DeLow. A postscript, filmed six months after the tournament, catches up with the featured players.

# The Players

France 2011

Directors: various

Certificate 18 107m 21s

Jean Dujardin's first post-*The Artist* venture feels like a chance to let it all hang out in the afterglow of Oscar respectability. A raunchy, uneven ragbag of shorts that erratically mines the subject of infidelity, *The Players* marks a sidestep from pastiche for both Dujardin and fellow prizewinner Michel Hazanavicius (who contributes one of the film's segments) after spy spoofs (the *OSS 117* instalments) and silent-era homage. It's most obviously a vehicle for Dujardin and – to a lesser extent – his co-star/co-writer Gilles Lellouche to show their range, the duo essaying a gallery of philanderers across all six shorts and the ribald miniatures punctuating them. Consequently, *The Players* is more extended sketch show than portmanteau film.

Fred Cavayé's prologue opens proceedings busily, as negligent husbands Greg (Lellouche) and Fred (Dujardin) hit the town for ultimately deflating one-night stands. As they leer over targets, carp about monogamy and chatter even whilst engaged in sexual conquests, there's a predictable hint that these bosom buddies may be in denial – a notion picked up in gleefully crass fashion when the pair return in the vapid Dujardin/Lellouche-directed epilogue 'Las Vegas'. As with many of the segments, Cavayé's item seems unsure when to end, making for a bumpy segue into the next chapter.

## CREDITS

**Directors**  
Emmanuelle Bercot  
Fred Cavayé  
Alex Courtes  
Michel Hazanavicius  
Eric Lartigau  
Jean Dujardin  
Gilles Lellouche  
**Produced by**  
Eric Hannezo  
Vincent Labrune  
Guillaume Lacroix

**Written by**  
Jean Dujardin  
Gilles Lellouche  
Stéphane Joly  
Philippe Caverivière  
Nicolas Bedos  
**Original Idea**  
Jean Dujardin  
**Adaptation**  
Nicolas Bedos  
**Director of Photography**

Guillaume Schiffman  
**Editor**  
Anny Danché  
**Art Director**  
Maamar Ech-Cheikh  
**Original Music**  
Evgueni Galperine  
Sacha Galperine  
**Sound**  
Pierre Gamet  
Alain Féat  
Nicolas Dambroise  
Marc Doisine  
**Costume Designer**  
Carine Sarfati

©JD Prod, Black Dynamite Films, Mars Films, M6 Films, Cool Industrie  
**Production Companies**  
JD Prod and Black Dynamite Films present in co-production with Mars Films, M6

Hazanavicius's standout segment, 'La bonne conscience', dials down the tempo, introducing tinges of desperation and bleakness that continue throughout the two more overtly dramatic stories that follow. Owing something to the cringe comedy of Ricky Gervais and Larry David, a restrained Dujardin plays an awkward executive whose hopes of extramarital activity at a drab convention are met with escalating humiliation. Meanwhile Lellouche takes centre stage in Eric Lartigau's 'Lolita', which, like its MOR-listening dentist protagonist, is a pretty stale account of an older man struggling to keep up with his carefree student mistress. There are perceptive moments but the story doesn't go anywhere fruitful and the serious pitch is upended by Dujardin's incongruous cameo as a drug-addled clubber.

Needless to say, *The Players* is thus far a solidly male-centric collection. As if to temper this, Emmanuelle Bercot's two-hander 'La Question' begins with a lingering shot of Alexandra Lamy, who stars with real-life spouse Dujardin in a tale of an apparently contented couple who start to doubt each other's fidelity after a friend (Lellouche) admits frankly to affairs. It's nicely played by the leads but eventually outstays its welcome.

All the kinky bit-players from the mini-shorts convene for Alex Courtès's broad 'Les Infidèles anonymes', which imagines a therapy group for adulterers. There's comic mugging galore, shrewdly edited by Anny Danché, but the juicy set-up is squandered by a flaccid punchline. It's one too many for *The Players*, which ultimately fails to be much more than an inconsistent muddle. ♦♦ Matthew Taylor

Films, Cool Industrie  
With the participation of M6, Canal+, W9 and Cine +  
In association with Sofica Manon 2, Wild Bunch, Tordjman Levy Bros  
Produced by JD Prod, Les Dujs, Black Dynamite Films

## CAST

**Jean Dujardin**  
Fred/Olivier/François/Laurent/James  
**Gilles Lellouche**  
Greg/Nicolas/Bernard/Antoine/Eric  
**Guillaume Canet**  
Thibault  
**Sandrine Kiberlain**  
Marie-Christine  
**Alexandra Lamy**  
Lisa

**Mathilda May**  
Ariane  
**Géraldine Nakache**  
Christine  
**Isabelle Nanty**  
Stéphanie  
**Manu Payet**  
Simon  
**Clara Ponsot**  
Inès

**Dolby Digital In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
Momentum Pictures

**9,661 ft +8 frames**

French theatrical title  
**Les Infidèles**

# Prometheus

USA/United Kingdom 2012

Director: Ridley Scott

Certificate 15 123m 36s

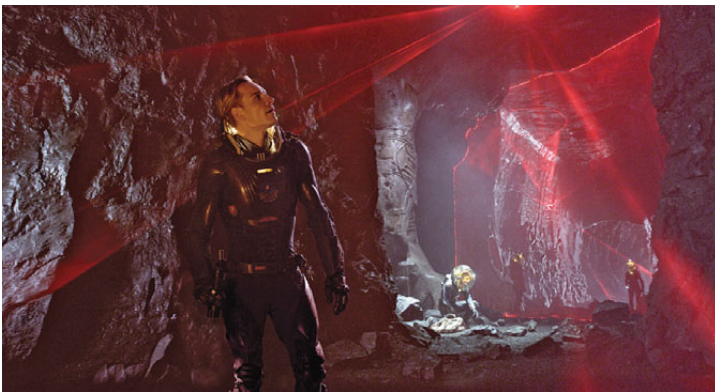
Ridley Scott is so synonymous with science fiction thanks to *Alien* (1979) and *Blade Runner* (1982) that it's surprising *Prometheus* is only his third genre effort. Billed as a prequel to *Alien*, it's generally a very different beast, replacing the earlier film's lean-and-mean slasher-movie approach with something far more elaborate, not to say convoluted. Thematic comparisons have already been drawn with 2001's *A Space Odyssey* (1968) and the speculative 'paleo-contact' fictions of Erich von Däniken, though there's a closer affinity with Jindřich Polák's undeservedly obscure Czechoslovak sci-fi *Icarus XB 1* (1963). Aside from both films being named after mythological Greek figures who tragically overreached themselves, they have many narrative points in common, including the discovery of a booby-trapped vessel full of corpses.

Polák's film, however, didn't have to conform to a pre-existing situational template, and *Prometheus* often struggles to reconcile its intergalactic origins-of-life quest with the need to deliver regular gloopy shocks. The latter come frequently enough, but they have little of the visceral impact of the equivalents in *Alien*: not only has the element of surprise been comprehensively undermined by three decades of sequels and ripoffs, but the larger cast's inherent disposability means that we care much less about the characters' fate.

While *Alien* featured seven memorably nuanced and shaded characters, in *Prometheus* good actors like Charlize Theron (as the ice-queen mission director Meredith Vickers), Rafe Spall, Sean Harris and Kate Dickie are given frustratingly little to do, and an 11th-hour revelation about Vickers's parentage is a complete non-event. Idris Elba, Logan Marshall-Green and Noomi Rapace are more rounded as, respectively, the *Prometheus*'s captain Janek and the driven archaeologists Holloway and Shaw, but they also fall victim to narrative and genre demands – even Shaw's religious faith is barely touched on in a film whose set-piece mission sets out to overturn "three centuries of Darwinism". No one could accuse *Prometheus* of lacking ambition or ideas, but the latter are too often presented as citations instead of component parts of a fully thought-through thesis.

But it would be churlish not to acknowledge two considerable strengths. From the near-abstract opening sequence in which an alien 'Engineer' seemingly engenders the Earth with life, Scott certainly hasn't lost his eye, although the *Prometheus*'s state-of-the-art holographic CGI displays make a chronological nonsense of the *Nostromo*'s primitive wireframe graphics in the ostensibly 'later' *Alien*. Shaw's recorded dreams, eavesdropped on by the android David, resemble Alexandre Alexeïeff and Claire Parker's pin-screen technique in their eerie fragmentation. Shooting in 3D, Scott and his cinematographer





I, robot: Michael Fassbender

◀ Dariusz Wolski favour a restrained approach (the silica storm being the most aggressively in-your-face), though it's ironic that the Engineer's spacecraft is so proudly three-dimensional here when its equivalent was represented by a blatant painted backdrop in *Alien*.

The other major plus is Michael Fassbender's performance as David, the film's most rounded and intriguing character. Explicitly modelling himself on Peter O'Toole's Lawrence of Arabia both physically and temperamentally (Fassbender also drew on Dirk Bogarde in *The Servant* and David Bowie in *The Man Who Fell to Earth*), he's just as inscrutable,

as capable of performing surreptitious (potentially fatal) experiments on his colleagues as he is of offering them life-saving advice and assistance. Significantly, he makes most of the key discoveries, whether opening up what turns out to be the Engineers' biological-weapons division or exploring a now-working version of one of H.R. Giger's most memorable set designs. Presumably David's human colleagues were there to keep him in check (otherwise, why not simply staff the Prometheus with similar creations?) but, as in *Blade Runner*, they prove lamentably ill suited to the task.

◆ Michael Brooke

## CREDITS

### Produced by

Ridley Scott  
David Giler  
Walter Hill

### Written by

Jon Spaihts  
Damon Lindelof

### Director of

Photography  
Dariusz Wolski

### Film Editor

Pietro Scalia

### Production Designer

Arthur Max

### Music

Marc Streitenfeld

### Production

Sound Mixer

Simon Hayes

### Costume Designer

Janty Yates

### Visual Effects

MPC

Weta Digital Ltd

Fuel VFX

Rising Sun Pictures

Hammerhead

Productions

Invisible Effects

Prologue Films

Lola VFX

Stunt Co-ordinator

Rob Inch

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Corporation and Dune

Entertainment III LLC

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Company, Twentieth

Century Fox Film

Corporation and Dune

Entertainment III LLC

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Japan and Spain)

Production

Companies

Twentieth Century

Fox presents in

association with Dune

Entertainment a Scott

Free/Brandywine

production

A Ridley Scott film

Executive Producers

Michael Costigan

Mark Huffman

Michael Ellenberg

Damon Lindelof

Film Extracts

Lawrence of Arabia

(1962)

CAST

Noomi Rapace

Elizabeth Shaw

Michael Fassbender

David

Guy Pearce

Peter Weyland

Idris Elba

Janek

Logan Marshall-Green

Charlie Holloway

Charlize Theron

Meredith Vickers

Sean Harris

Fifield

Rafe Spall

Millburn

Emun Elliott

Chance

Benedict Wong

Ravel

Kate Dickie

Ford

Dolby Digital/Datasat

Digital Sound

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Distributor

20th Century Fox

International (UK)

Some screenings

presented in 3D

2D/3D version

123m 36s

11,124 ft +0 frames

IMAX prints

124m 35s

179,400 ft

# Requiem for a Killer

France 2011

Director: Jérôme Le Gris

Certificate 12A 92m 12s

Jérôme Le Gris's debut feature is a glorious mess, a thriller so poorly executed it's actually rather entertaining.

A peroxided Mélanie Laurent plays Lucrèce, an opera singer turned assassin who signs up for one last job before retirement: taking out hunky baritone Alexander Child (gamely played by Christopher Stills), whose own plans to retire to a distillery in Scotland threaten to disrupt the construction of a major oil pipeline. Lucrèce poses as a singer in order to get close to him; she and her future victim are to perform Handel's 'Messiah' at a lavish Swiss chateau. But renegade special agent Rico (Clovis Cornillac) has been hauled in by his bosses for one last job of his own: to track down Child's would-be killer.

The scene is thus set for a taut game of cat and mouse. And an opening sequence in which Lucrèce offs a target during Mass with a poisoned communion wafer suggests a stylish, subtle thriller. But *Requiem for a Killer* is not that film: there's too much going on, and yet not enough. Characters are sketched in, with backstories tacked on yet never developed. We never learn why Lucrèce gave up opera to become an assassin, nor why, at this point, she's had enough – she certainly doesn't seem to have any moral reservations about her work. Laurent stalks glacially through her scenes, although she pulls off an impressive miming act during the singing sequences; Cornillac (best known internationally as the live-action embodiment of Astérix) looks simply bored. The marvellous Tcheky Karyo pops up as Lucrèce's boss and mentor, effectively reprising his role in Luc Besson's *Nikita* (1990) and in the process reminding us how much more interesting that film's flawed heroine was.

Antoine Monod's cinematography is similarly superficial, the saturated colours and sweeping camera movements lending a car-ad aesthetic to the film. But what *Requiem* lacks in depth it makes up for in breadth. Le Gris greedily piles in twists, turns, set pieces and flashbacks, making for some extremely

peculiar tonal shifts. Beginning as a slick, contemporary action film, all leather and steel, once at the baroque chateau it transforms into an Agatha Christie-style murder mystery, especially after Lucrèce's original contract is revoked and she, along with the original target, ends up on the hit list of a new, unknown killer who also roams the grounds. Here too misjudged elements of farce creep in (one can only assume intentionally): Rico accidentally kills a mentally impaired gardener; Lucrèce inadvertently poisons the wrong man during a wine-tasting. Her boss wonders, "What the hell are we still doing here?" It's a good question.

Le Gris is clearly a Hitchcock fan. A sequence in a wine cellar recalls *Notorious*, while the concert-hall climax rips off *The Man Who Knew Too Much*. There's an icy blonde, a series of doublings and double-crosses and a string-laden Bernard Herrmann-esque score. But the director fails to grasp that it's the spirit and not the letter that matters. Hitchcock would no doubt be rolling in his grave at the film's bathetic denouement, in which the hero saves the day with a text message.

◆ Catherine Wheatley

## CREDITS

### Producer

Alain Terzian

### Written by

Jérôme Le Gris

### Director of

Photography

Antoine Monod

### Editor

Clare Fieschi

### Art Director

Maamar Ech-Cheikh

### Original Music

Régis Vogelene

Jiri Heger

Anne-Sophie

Versnaeyen

### Sound Recordists

Guillaume Le Braz

Laurent Cerleux

### Costume Designer

Catherine Rigault

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Studiocanal, France 2

Cinema, Rhône-

Alpes Cinéma

### Production

Companies

Alain Terzian presents

an Alter Films, Studio

Canal, France 2

Cinema, Rhône-Alpes

Cinema co-production

With the participation

of Canal+, France

Televisions, Region

Rhône-Alpes, Centre

national du cinéma et

de l'image animée

In association with

Banque Postale Image 4

## Executive Producer

Thierry Muscat

## CAST

Mélanie Laurent

Lucrèce

Clovis Cornillac

Rico

Tcheky Karyo

Armenian

Xavier Gallais

Xavier de Ferrières

Christopher Stills

Alexander Child

Michel Fau

orchestra leader

Corrado Invernizzi

Vittorio Biamonte

Johan Leysen

Van Kummant

Frédérique Tirmont

colonel

Julie Fuchs

Olga Babayova

Clara Ruscon

Lucrèce's daughter

the priest

Philippe Morier-Genoud

Dolby Digital/DTS

In Colour

[2.35:1]

Subtitles

Distributor

Studiocanal Limited

8,298 ft +0 frames

French theatrical title

Requiem pour

une tueuse

**SYNOPSIS** Isle of Skye, 2089. Archaeologists Elizabeth Shaw and Charlie Holloway discover cave paintings proposing the moon LV-223 as a source of mankind's ancestry via alien 'Engineers'.

In 2093 the spaceship Prometheus arrives on LV-223. Mission director Meredith Vickers screens a message from backer Peter Weyland. An exploration team – Shaw, Holloway, biologist Milburn, geologist Fifield, medic Ford and android David – find an Engineer corpse and hundreds of small caskets. A storm forces their return to the Prometheus, though Milburn and Fifield are left stranded. Engineer DNA matches that of humans. David transfers a drop of a casket's contents into Holloway's drink. Holloway and Shaw make love. Milburn and Fifield are attacked by a worm-like creature. A search party discovers Milburn's corpse. David finds an Engineer spacecraft, whose pilot is in suspended animation. Vickers refuses to let a seriously ill Holloway back on board the Prometheus, killing him instead. An unexpectedly pregnant Shaw uses an automated surgical device to remove a tentacular foetus, which she locks in an escape pod. A mutated Fifield kills several people before being downed. Weyland is found on board, insisting that the Prometheus complete its mission. Shaw, Weyland, David and Ford visit the Engineer spacecraft. Its revived pilot kills Weyland and Ford, decapitates David and launches the vessel. Captain Janek deliberately crashes the Prometheus into it. Vickers launches the escape pod but is crushed by falling debris. The Engineer survives the crash. Shaw lures it into the pod containing her now gigantic 'offspring'. A still communicative David tells Shaw how to operate another Engineer craft. An alien bursts out of the Engineer's chest.





Holy motors: 'Revenge of the Electric Car'

## Revenge of the Electric Car

USA 2011

Director: Chris Paine

Chris Paine has returned to his favourite subject in this rather less successful follow-up to his excellent *Who Killed the Electric Car?* (2006), which was incidentally a portrait of American corporatism at its most villainous. That film covered the frankly bizarre story of the largest automotive company in the world, General Motors, not only ceasing manufacture of its pioneering EV1 overnight but also recalling every single model. One by one GM trucks turned up outside houses, including those of celebrity enthusiasts such as Danny DeVito, loaded up their EV1s and drove them away to the junkyard to be trashed.

It seems now that the cameras never stopped rolling, and over the following three years Paine recorded the fallout of this disastrous policy and – not without a little schadenfreude – the filing for bankruptcy by GM in 2009 and the company's subsequent bailout by the Obama administration. At the same time Nissan was taking a strong lead by committing all its resources to an electric future, mainly under the stewardship of its feline CEO Carlos Ghosn. There's quite a bit here too about former GM vice chairman Bob Lutz, whose dramatic conversion from petrol-head to 'electric is the future' seems to have a special place in Paine's heart – there is after all nothing better than a reformed sinner – and on film he's easily the most personable character here, looking for all the world like a cigar-chomping WWII general straight out of central casting. Paine's best coup, though, is his portrait of new kid on the block Elon Musk, who ploughed most of his dotcom millions into making the new Tesla electric car. We follow as his project teeters on the edge of disaster before the final successful share float. Ghosn, a Brazilian-born Frenchman of Lebanese descent, is easily the most interesting figure here, but Paine never really gets to grips with him, maybe because of lack of access, but more likely because he is just too inscrutably foreign.

Paine's interest in the electric car is heavily slanted towards a US viewpoint, without ever really explaining the specific cultural meme this entails.

His lack of basic impartiality can sometimes be a problem (at one point Musk is standing beside a Tesla which turns out to belong to Paine) and the voiceover by Tim Robbins only adds to a general sense of a solipsistic liberal consensus: once everyone drives an electric car, everything will be fine.

If you're looking for at least some overview of transport and consumerism – a necessary context, one would have thought – you certainly won't find it here. The frankly dumb, upbeat tone of the last five minutes feels like a betrayal of what little analysis was on offer beforehand. At the time of writing this review, the ex-GM subsidiary Saab appears to be facing an all-electric future after an 11th-hour rescue. One can only assume that Paine is already booking his plane tickets to Sweden. We certainly haven't heard the last of him on this subject.

♦♦ Roger Clarke

### CREDITS

**Producers**  
Jessie Deeter  
P.G. Morgan  
**Written by**  
P.G. Morgan  
Chris Paine  
**Director of Photography**  
Thaddeus Wadleigh  
**Editor**  
Chris A Peterson  
**Original Music**  
David Robbins  
**Sound**  
Tyler Bender  
Sean Demers

©A Westmidwest production  
**Production Companies**  
Westmidwest Productions presents a film by Chris Paine

**Executive Producer**  
Stefano Durdic

**Narrator**  
Tim Robbins

**Dolby Digital In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Dogwoof

**SYNOPSIS** A documentary overview of the resurgence of the electric car, especially in the US market, following the infamous decision by General Motors in 2006 to recall and destroy its cutting-edge electric model the EV1. The film follows three industry pioneers over several years: Elon Musk, the Paypal millionaire who set up Tesla Motors from scratch, Carlos Ghosn, CEO of Nissan, and Bob Lutz, former GM vice chairman and now an electric-car evangelist. The film also looks at the 'do-it-yourself' culture of small, independent US garages which are converting petrol cars to electric.

## Rock of Ages

USA 2012

Director: Adam Shankman

Certificate 12A 123m 12s

Just as the jukebox musical is on its last stage legs, Hollywood has discovered the show-strain John Lahr dubbed "a concert with conflict". Or in the case of *Rock of Ages* and its ebullient but thinly stretched celebration of 1980s hair-metal, more of a mixtape with jokes. This is truly a jukebox musical, celebrating a genre rather than an oeuvre, cramming well-known rock anthems and ballads into a stylised LA-set love story between aspiring young singers/bar workers Sherrie and Drew. As a result, it lacks the musical and emotional coherence of *Mamma Mia!* (2008) or that film's deft way with comic melodrama. What this metal mash-up has going for it is a thick seam of affectionate, exuberant 1980s parody that makes a (very) little go a long way.

Director Adam Shankman approaches the Sunset Strip of the 1980s as he did the Baltimore of the 1960s in *Hairspray* (2007), cherry-picking styles and attitudes in his characteristically bouncy fashion. His selective nostalgia gently mocks the big hair and spandex of the era, and paints Sherrie and Drew as rock-enthused small-towners crowing "I love rock 'n' roll" with conviction rather than caricature. The script by Justin Theroux, Allan Loeb and Chris D'Arenzio ups the tongue-in-cheek tone of D'Arenzio's original stage show, tossing in an anti-rock crusade by mayor's wife Patty Whitmore (a sizzling and short-changed Catherine Zeta-Jones) which recalls *Footloose* as well as Tipper Gore's real-life music-censorship campaign.

It's all harmless fun, nothing like as clever or well honed as *This Is Spinal Tap* (1984) and slightly toothless, despite a

sliver of mock-shocking male romance between Dennis (Alec Baldwin), the owner of the Bourbon Room (a dead ringer for the Whisky a Go Go), and Russell Brand's club MC Lonny. There's no sly skewering of rock sexism or the sameness of the film's roster of rock standards – it's an unabashed paean to live rock music and fandom. The record-album-as-object even achieves the status of hallowed 80s fetish here, wept over when stolen, sent as a love token, and danced across in Tower Records in the film's greatest outpouring of nostalgia.

Nonetheless, *Rock of Ages* is pure 2012 in its mirroring of TV's reality-talent-show obsession with rock anthems and in its *Glee*-style karaoke-ification of performance. Unlike *Mamma Mia!*'s vocally variable but heartfelt soundtrack, every song is buffed up uniformly brightly (a little Auto-Tuned perhaps), with only Mary J. Blige's soulful stint as a soft-hearted strip-club owner retaining a belting authenticity. The film is like a celebrity version of *Pop Idol*, in which you can see Tom Cruise wrestling Def Leppard's 'Pour Some Sugar on Me' into submission. Cruise, in that deadpan, take-no-prisoners mode familiar from *Tropic Thunder* (2008), bestrides the movie like a colossus in a jewelled codpiece and bare-bum chaps, his spoilt rock superstar Stacey Jaxx channelling Axl Rose. He throws himself into the onstage strutting and offstage posturing with a seriousness that is far funnier than Brand and Baldwin's sophomoric exchanges because of its giddily ironic elision of real-life screen icon and fictional rock god. His sheer star wattage also overshadows the central love story, whose juvenile leads Julianne Hough and Diego Boneta struggle haplessly with cursory plotting and the film's inability to stop mocking 1980s movie clichés long enough to make its emotions stick. If this were an album, you'd sum it up as 'one killer, much filler'.

♦♦ Kate Stables



Guitar zeroes: Alec Baldwin, Tom Cruise



CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Matthew Weaver  
Scott Prisant  
Carl Levin  
Tobey Maguire  
Garrett Grant  
Jennifer Gibot  
**Screenplay**  
Justin Theroux  
Chris D'Arenzo  
Based on the musical  
written by Chris  
D'Arenzo, Allan Loeb  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Bojan Bazelli  
**Editor**  
Emma E. Hickox  
**Production Designer**  
Jon Hutman  
**Original Score**  
Adam Anders  
Peer Astrom  
**Sound Mixer**  
William Kaplan  
**Costume Designer**  
Rita Ryack

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**Production**  
**Companies**  
New Line Cinema  
presents a Corner  
Store Entertainment  
production  
In association with  
Material Pictures  
and Offspring  
Entertainment  
An Adam  
Shankman film  
Made possible through  
a grant by the Miami  
Beach Visitor and  
Convention Authority  
Film Incentive  
Grant Program  
**Executive Producers**  
Toby Emmerich  
Richard Brener  
Michael Disco  
Samuel J. Brown

Hillary Butorac Weaver  
Janet Billig Rich  
Adam Shankman  
Chris D'Arenzo

CAST

**Julianne Hough**  
Sherrie Christian  
**Diego Boneta**  
Drew Boley  
**Russell Brand**  
Lonny  
**Paul Giamatti**  
Paul Gill  
**Catherine Zeta-Jones**  
Patricia Whitmore  
**Malin Akerman**  
Constance Sack  
**Mary J. Blige**  
Justice  
**Alec Baldwin**  
Dennis Dupree  
**Tom Cruise**  
Stacey Jaxx

**Dolby Digital/**  
**Datasat/SDDS**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Warner Bros  
Distributors (UK)

11,088 ft +0 frames

**SYNOPSIS** US, 1987. Small-town singer Sherrie arrives in Los Angeles; aspiring singer/bartender Drew finds her a job waitressing at the Bourbon Room club. Mayor's wife Patty Whitmore resolves to clean up Sunset Strip. Drew and Sherrie fall in love. Drew's band opens for superstar Stacey Jaxx's band at the club. Stacey's arrogance annoys *Rolling Stone* interviewer Constance, but she falls for him. Drew mistakenly thinks Sherrie has slept with Stacey; they break up, and he is signed by Stacey's manager Paul. Paul reneges on his promise of a free gig, appropriating the night's takings, which should have paid the club's tax debt. Brokenhearted Sherrie becomes a pole-dancer at the Venus Club. Patty announces that the Bourbon Room will close for non-payment of taxes. Stacey promises his first solo gig to the Bourbon Room for free, to pay its tax bill. He fires Paul as a result of Constance's caustic magazine profile, and is reunited with her. Patty is disgraced on live TV by the revelation that she was once Stacey's discarded groupie. Drew, repackaged by Paul as a rapper, is reunited with Sherrie after abandoning his boy band mid-performance. Sherrie performs the song he wrote for her, which Stacey takes up. The Bourbon Room is saved. A year later Sherrie, Drew and Stacey perform together in front of a roaring stadium audience.

Searching for Sugar Man

United Kingdom 2012  
Director: Malik Bendjelloul  
Certificate 12A 86m 19s

The artist who's 'big in Japan' but nowhere else; the artist who toils in quiet obscurity for years before finally, in their twilight, being rediscovered and achieving their due recognition. Malik Bendjelloul's first feature-length documentary, *Searching for Sugar Man*, combines both of these classic music-biz stories in one hugely enjoyable narrative: two South African music fans set out to discover the fate of their idol Sixto Rodriguez, an American singer-songwriter rumoured to have shot himself in despair on stage in the early 1970s, and their detective work ends up sparking an unlikely resurrection in the present day.

In a sense, *Sugar Man*'s very first moments subtly anticipate what's to follow. A car is driving down a cliff-top coastal highway, high above the waves, lit by the setting sun, an American voice singing over a strummed acoustic; it has to be California's Route 1, surely? But in fact it's South Africa – assumptions and superficial appearances, we realise, aren't safe. Similarly, the members of the South African musical counterculture that Bendjelloul introduces us to are wrongly convinced that Rodriguez is both an internationally adored songwriter, as recognised as Dylan or Joni Mitchell, and long dead. As its initial interviewees recount ever more gory rumours about Rodriguez's supposed suicide, *Sugar Man* acquires as one theme the unruly way in which musical mythologies developed in an era before the internet and its high-speed hive-mind fact-checking.

But this is also an exercise in myth-making itself. Bendjelloul's film is a masterful piece of storytelling, not just in the way it builds up to a classic emotional payoff for both the fan-detectives and their hero-slash-quarry, but for the care with which he approaches the story at its outset. Bendjelloul barely provides a glimpse of Rodriguez in the first act of the film – a couple of old publicity stills in which he's masked by dark shades flash before the viewer. His first producer recounts seeing (or rather not seeing) Rodriguez perform live, hidden by smoke and facing away from the audience in a Detroit dive (depicted in one of several well-judged animated vignettes). Even when we meet the definitely alive Rodriguez he sits back from the light cast by a window, sunglasses on even in the shade – all of which accentuates his natural unworldliness, a kind of Zen indifference to externalities that makes him seem near-absent, even when present in the room. This quality makes it all the more extraordinary that when his music career proved to be stillborn, he slipped uncomplainingly out of the limelight to work for decades on backbreaking construction jobs, ripping the fixtures and fittings out of Detroit houses (though it does seem a slightly uncanny flashforward to downtown

Detroit's present-day physical decay). With so much material in Sixto's life and the South African backstory to fill in, Bendjelloul occasionally skimps on the American context: he draws no connections between Rodriguez and the fertile music scene of Detroit at the time, which included Motown, the Stooges, the MC5 and Parliament-Funkadelic. You can also see some of the stitches holding together Bendjelloul's narrative: the two super-fans, Steve 'Sugar' Segerman and journalist Craig Bartholomew, are almost too eloquent in telling their stories. At times their contributions have the slightly flat vivaciousness of the over-rehearsed raconteur. But *Searching for Sugar Man* is also full of fascinating details: the shady record-label owner who takes unkindly to questions concerning the whereabouts of Rodriguez's royalties from South African sales, or the moment when a South African official reveals how censors ensured a Rodriguez song with explicit lyrics couldn't be played on the radio (the track on the station's copy of the LP was scratched into oblivion). And of course, for anyone who's never heard them, there's the pleasure of discovering Sixto Rodriguez's poetic and beguiling songs.

♦♦ Sam Davies

CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Simon Chinn  
Malik Bendjelloul  
**Written by**  
Malik Bendjelloul  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Camilla Skagerström  
**Edited by**  
Malik Bendjelloul  
**Sound Designer**  
Per Nystrom

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**Production**  
**Companies**  
A Red Box Films &  
Passion Pictures  
production in  
association with  
Canfield Pictures &  
The Documentary  
Company  
A film by Malik  
Bendjelloul  
**Executive Producers**  
Hjalmar Palmgren  
Sheryl Crown  
Maggie Montieth  
John Battsek

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**SYNOPSIS** A documentary telling the story of two South African music fans who set out to discover what happened to Sixto Rodriguez, an American singer-songwriter who notched up few sales in the US but, unbeknown to him, gained a huge cult following in South Africa. Interviews with producers, label executives, fans, Rodriguez and his family reconstruct the story of the artist's shortlived recording career in the 1970s, the subsequent years spent working in construction and political activism, and Rodriguez's eventual rediscovery, culminating in a series of concerts in South Africa.

Seeking a Friend for the End of the World

USA 2011  
Director: Lorene Scafaria  
Certificate 15 101m 10s

The polar opposite of the doomy *Melancholia* (2011), *Seeking a Friend for the End of the World* takes a jauntier view of the Apocalypse, seeing it as the opportunity for the ultimate blind date. The debut film of writer-director Lorene Scafaria (writer of *Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist*), it's a high-concept romantic comedy with deceptively indie trappings. It wraps its intriguing premise (a lonely man and his flaky English neighbour make a pact to help one another get their last wishes as an asteroid collision looms) in neatly offbeat comedy, but reverts to depressingly mainstream sentimentality once love walks in.

Like *Last Night* (1998), Don McKellar's similar dramedy, *Seeking a Friend* finds its early (and its best) laughs in the darkly funny and horribly plausible reactions of the media ("Your countdown to the End of Days – with all your classic rock favourites") and the decadence, desperation or plodding decency of everyone surrounding hero Dodge. Stunned by his wife's desertion to her lover, he stumbles through deserted work days ("Every day is Casual Friday now") and a dinner party that descends into amoral mayhem. Scafaria dots these scenes with nice jolts of black comedy – parents ply their children with martinis, and social niceties are twisted ("Hey everyone – Sarah and Dave brought heroin!").

Scafaria's gift for wry dialogue can't carry the film, however, once Dodge starts his final road trip with neighbour Penny. What was an amusingly choppy overview of apocalypse fever becomes a nakedly episodic narrative in which the pair ping pointlessly from one cute encounter to another. These interludes occasionally perk up the plot, especially William Petersen's hilariously bluff cameo as a trucker convinced that the two are the assassins he's hired to kill him. Yet more often – as with the loved-up Certificate PG orgy in a roadside restaurant – they feel like irritating filler. This is where Scafaria's inexperience as a director shows, in a reluctance to 'kill her darlings' and whip up the pace a bit.

There are echoes of *Nick and Norah's Infinite Playlist* in the plotting (the odd couple on a road trip) and also in the winding exchanges about music, family and lost chances that fill the couple's time together. But a fatal lack of chemistry between Steve Carell and Keira Knightley means that these scenes achieve only a fuzzy warmth. Carell, playing the lonely everyman he has perfected from *The 40-Year-Old Virgin* (2005) to *Crazy, Stupid Love* (2011), does have some delightful deadpan



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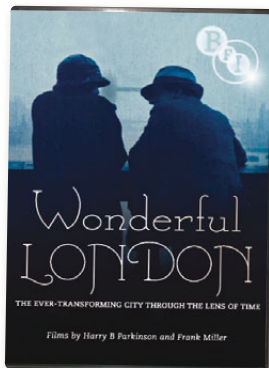
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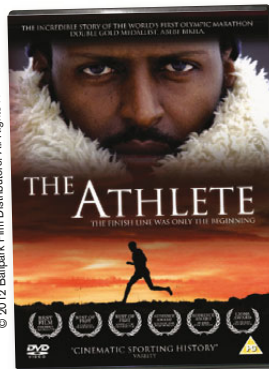
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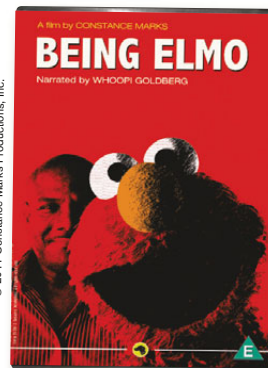
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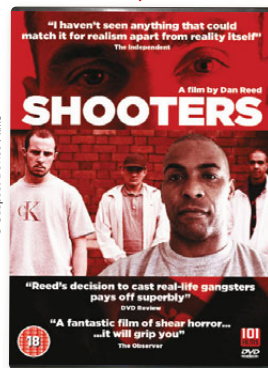
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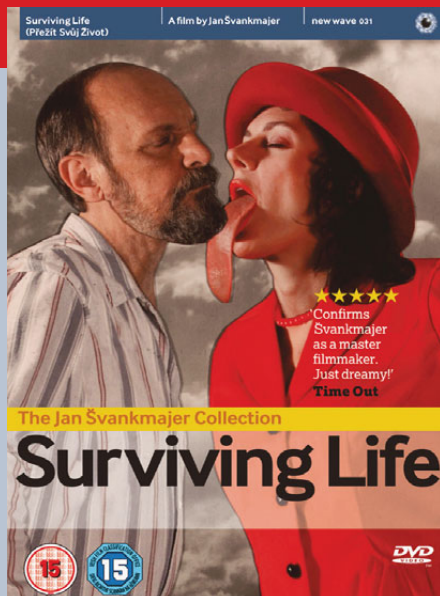
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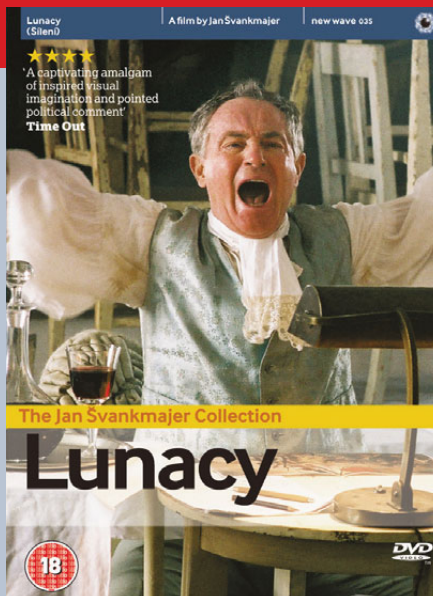
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'Confirms Švankmajer as a master film-maker'  
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★★★★★  
'A captivating amalgam of visual imagination and pointed political comment'  
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★★★★★  
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**Time Out**

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Apocalypse now: Steve Carell

← moments, lobbing an exquisitely thrown-away "I regret my entire life" into a casual goodbye to his cleaner. Knightley though, resorts to a kind of grinning gabble to establish herself as a Manic Pixie Dream Girl-type, and their combination of styles is distinctly lukewarm.

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Steve Golin  
Joy Gorman Wettels  
Steven Rales  
Mark Roybal  
**Written by**  
Lorene Scafaria  
**Director of Photography**  
Tim Orr  
**Film Editor**  
Zene Baker  
**Production Designer**  
Chris Spellman  
**Music**  
Rob Simonsen  
Jonathan Sadoff  
**Sound Mixer**  
Ben Patrick

**Costume Designer**  
Kristin M. Burke

**©Dodge Productions, LLC**  
**Production Companies**  
Focus Features,  
Mandate Pictures  
and Indian Paintbrush  
present an Anonymous  
Content production  
A Lorene Scafaria film  
**Executive Producers**  
Nathan Kahane  
Nicole Brown

## CAST

Steve Carell  
Dodge  
Keira Knightley  
Penny  
Adam Brody  
Owen  
Derek Luke  
Speck  
William Petersen  
trucker  
Connie Britton  
Diane  
Rob Corddry  
Warren  
Gillian Jacobs  
Katie, waitress  
Melanie Lynskey  
Karen  
T.J. Miller  
Darcy, chipper host

Mark Moses  
anchorman  
Martin Sheen  
Frank

**Dolby Digital**  
**Color by**  
Technicolor  
**Prints by**  
DeLuxe  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Studiocanal Limited  
9.105 ft +0 frames

# 7 Days in Havana

Spain/France/Cuba 2012

Directors: various

Seven short films set on consecutive days of the week in present-day Havana: it's a promising idea but, as with many other omnibus or portmanteau films, the parts of *7 Days in Havana* never make a satisfying whole. In theory it should work because, although only one of the seven directors is Cuban, the screenwriter of all the segments is Leonardo Padura, whose crime novels dig deep into the contrasting social strata of his native Havana.

Several of the segments feel tentative, even awkward, especially the opener 'El Yuma', directed by Benicio Del Toro. The central character is Teddy, an American film student – hence the reference to *3:10 to Yuma* and its remake. Entranced by his new environment and its young females in particular, Teddy finds his lusts misfiring when he unknowingly picks up a transsexual in a bar. We the audience have an interminable wait for the obvious joke to play out, and there are certainly no epiphanies in this view of Cuba seen through the eyes of a callow foreigner, only clichés.

Pablo Trapero's 'Jam Session' is told through what should be the keener eye of a film-director character, but is just as cliché-ridden. Emir Kusturica plays a version of himself, in Havana as guest of honour at a film festival and suffering a personal crisis – but unbelievably he's miscast. He belongs further up the Atlantic in Newfoundland where he was so superb as the fisherman condemned to death in Patrice Leconte's *The Widow of Saint-Pierre* (2000). Here he drowns in a sea of self-regard while also being cornily silhouetted against the actual sea. 'Jam Session' does, however, deliver one of the great moments of the whole portmanteau when Kusturica's chauffeur performs a brilliant impromptu trumpet solo – musical therapy to the self-obsessed director's ears.

'Diary of a Beginner' is another segment in which a director plays himself: this time it's the Palestinian Elia Suleiman, killing time while he waits to interview a VIP. Alone in his hotel he cultivates the mask of the melancholic clown, while by the seashore or in bars



Island life: Melvis Estévez

he observes other solitary weepers. It's all done with the minimum of dialogue, as if erasing the word automatically makes a film more cinematic, but the result is more vaudeville than cinema, Suleiman's character remaining locked in his own narcissistic pantomime.

Julio Medem's 'La tentación de Cecilia' has more narrative drive than the other segments, with the singer of the title on the verge of leaving her baseball-player boyfriend and taking off to Madrid with an impresario promising her the world and its international supper clubs. But although Cecilia's character begins to get beyond the one-dimensionality of the Cubans in many of the other stories, there's still a feeling of scraping at the facade and no more: the peeling Havana stucco remains intact as it were, a tourist image.

In a neat touch, Cecilia and her boyfriend also turn up in Juan Carlos Tabío's 'Dulce amargo.' And in another piece of 'intertextuality', a cake baked in that segment shows up in Lauren Cantet's 'La fuente'. Both these segments feel more directly engaged with the life of Havana than the other five, but the working-class characters in 'La fuente' are poorly orchestrated – it's as if they are waiting for their acting cues. Music – often worn heavily in the other segments – is here held back for effect, so

**SYNOPSIS** US, present day. On hearing that an asteroid will wipe out the Earth in three weeks' time, Dodge's wife runs away to her lover. Trying to continue as normal, a depressed Dodge meets his kooky neighbour Penny, who is longing to see her English family but has missed the last commercial flight home. She has received some of Dodge's mail by accident. Finding a recent love letter from his ex-girlfriend Olivia in the pile prompts Dodge to make a deal with Penny – if she takes him to Olivia in a nearby state, he will get her on a private plane home.

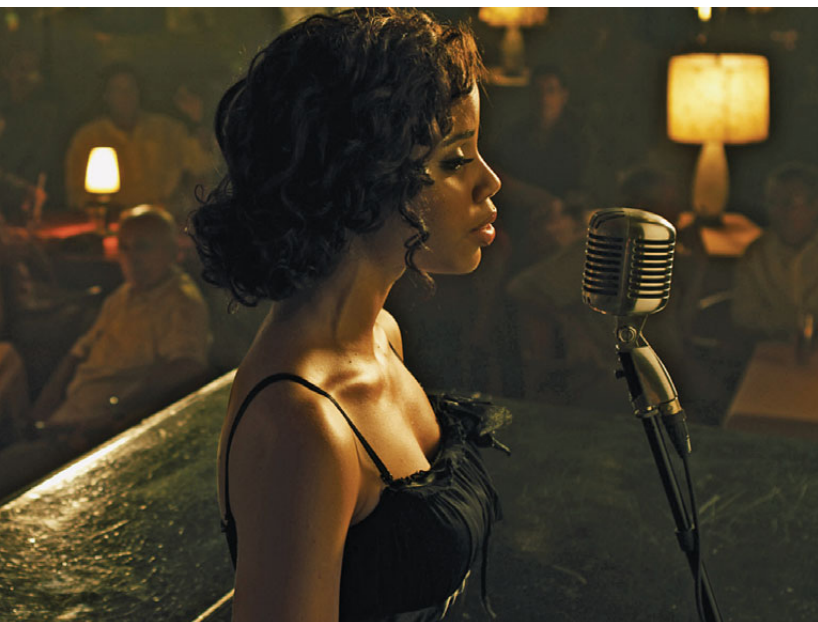
On the road they have an encounter with a man who assumes that they are hired assassins, dodge an orgy at a roadside restaurant, are jailed by a zealous traffic cop and visit Penny's survivalist ex-boyfriend, who wants her to join his group. When Penny calls her family, Dodge sees how much she loves them. The couple grow close. When they reach Olivia's home, Dodge leaves her a note on the door, deciding to spend the remaining time with Penny. He takes her to see his estranged father Frank, with whom he has an awkward reconciliation. Frank agrees to fly Penny to England in his private plane. Dodge puts an unsuspecting, sleeping Penny into the plane and returns to Penny's apartment to spend his final hours alone.

Penny appears, having woken en route and persuaded Frank to return her to Dodge. They pledge their love, and the world ends.

**SYNOPSIS** The film comprises seven segments set on consecutive days in present-day Havana.

'El Yuma' follows young American film student Teddy on his first trip to Havana; he is befriended by a cab driver who takes him on a sometimes comic odyssey mainly involving the city's vibrant nightlife. In 'Jam Session', director Emir Kusturica is in Havana to attend a film festival; he is helped through a personal crisis by his concerned chauffeur, who turns out to be a world-class trumpeter. In 'La tentación de Cecilia' a singer is offered work by a Spanish impresario and has to decide whether to follow him to Europe or stay with her impoverished boyfriend, a baseball player. 'Diary of a Beginner' follows the film director Elia Suleiman as he kills time while waiting to interview a Cuban VIP; he dispiritedly hangs around his hotel, the seashore, the local zoo and a bar for sex-tourists. In 'Ritual' the parents of a young schoolgirl submit her to a Santería ceremony to 'cleanse' her of lesbianism. In 'Dulce amargo' we see a typical day for Mirta, who has to cope with two jobs – as a baker-confectioner and TV pop psychologist – and her alcoholic husband. Finally 'La fuente' tells the story of Martha, an old prophetess who browbeats her neighbours into refurbishing her apartment so that she can host a ritual venerating the Virgin Mary and Oshun, the Santería love deity.





that we can feel the impact when 'Ave Maria' accompanies a ceremony where Catholicism and Santería rub shoulders. This scene is a benign echo of Gaspar Noé's relentless segment 'Ritual', which features a Santería 'cleansing' complete with menacing serrated-edge knife and ripped knickers. It's voodoo tourism, a taster for a remake of Wes Craven's Haitian *The Serpent and the Rainbow* (1988). If you want anything more enlightening about voodoo than Noé's romp, consult Maya Deren's films. And if you want to see a Cuban portmanteau that really works, then watch Humberto Solás's *Lucía* (1968), whose three tales add up to a truly great film.

👉 **Paul Tickell**

## CREDITS

**Directed by**  
Benicio del Toro  
Pablo Trapero  
Julio Medem  
Elia Suleiman  
Gaspar Noé  
Juan Carlos Tabío  
Laurent Cantet  
**Produced by**  
Alvaro Longoria  
Gaël Nouaille  
Laurent Baudens  
Didar Domehri  
Fabien Pisani  
**Directors of Photography**  
Daniel Aranyó  
Diego Dussuel  
**Art Director**  
Juan Pedro de Gaspar  
**Music**  
Xavi Turull  
**Sound**  
Eva Valiño  
Charly Schmukler  
Nicolas de Poulpique  
**Costumes**  
Juan Pedro de Gaspar

©Morena Films  
- Maneki Films  
- Borsalino Productions  
- Chaocorp Distribution  
**Production Companies**  
Full House & Morena  
Films in collaboration  
with Havana Club  
International SA in  
association with  
Backup Films, Sofica  
Coficup, Palatine  
Etoile 8 & 9, Chaocorp  
Distribution and M&C  
Saatchi. GAD with  
the collaboration of

ICAA - ICAIC with the  
participation of Canal  
+ France present  
**Executive Producers**  
Cristina Zumarraga  
Pilar Benito

## EL YUMA

**Director**  
Benicio del Toro  
**Producer**  
Alvaro Longoria  
**Screenplay**  
Leonardo Padura  
**Editor**  
Rich Fox  
**Executive Producer**  
Laura Bickford

## CAST

Josh Hutcherson  
Teddy Atkins  
Vladimir Cruz  
Angelito  
Magali Wilson  
Cambista  
Daisy Granados  
Delia  
Claudia Muñoz  
Norka

## JAM SESSION

**Director**  
Pablo Trapero  
**Producer**  
Gaël Nouaille  
**Screenplay**  
Alejandro Fadel  
Martín Máuregui  
Santiago Mitre  
Pablo Trapero  
**Editors**  
Santiago Esteves  
Pablo Trapero

## CAST

Emir Kusturica  
actor  
Alexander Abreu  
chauffeur  
Marianela Pupo  
assistant  
Miriam Learra  
mother  
Enrique Nuñez  
Rodríguez  
film producer

## LA TENTACIÓN DE CECILIA

**Director**  
Julio Medem  
**Producer**  
Alvaro Longoria  
**Screenplay**  
Leonardo Padura  
Julio Medem  
**Editor**  
Julio Medem

## CAST

Daniel Brühl  
Leonardo  
Melvis Estévez  
Cecilia  
Leo Benitez  
José  
Vladimir Cruz  
Angelito

## DIARY OF A BEGINNER

**Director**  
Elia Suleiman  
**Producers**  
Laurent Baudens  
Gaël Nouaille  
**Screenplay**  
Elia Suleiman  
**Editor**  
Veronique Lange

## CAST

Elia Suleiman  
himself  
Irene del Valle  
hotel waitress  
Sebastián Barriuso  
Elia Suleiman's driver

## RITUAL

**Director**  
Gaspar Noé  
**Producer**  
Laurent Baudens  
**Screenplay**  
Gaspar Noé  
**Editors**  
Gaspar Noé  
Thomas Fernández  
**Costumes**  
Ornaima Salem

## CAST

Cristela de la  
Caridad Herrera  
girl  
Othello Rensoli  
Babalao  
Dunia Matos  
Hernandez  
friend

## DULCE AMARGO

**Director**  
Juan Carlos Tabío  
**Producer**  
Alvaro Longoria  
**Screenplay**  
Leonardo Padura  
**Editor**  
Berta Frías

## CAST

Mirtha Ibarra  
Mirta Gutierrez  
Jorge Perugorria  
Daniel  
Melvis Estévez  
Cecilia  
Vladimir Cruz  
Angelito  
Andros Perugorria  
Ramoncito

## LA FUENTE

**Director**  
Laurent Cantet  
**Producer**  
Didar Domehri  
**Screenplay**  
Laurent Cantet  
**Editor**  
Alexandro Rodríguez

## CAST

Nathalia Amore  
Marta  
Othello Rensoli  
Babalao  
Andrés Vidal  
Pedro, Marta's husband  
Alexis Vidal  
Manolo, works boss

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

Spanish theatrical title  
7 días en La Habana

# A Simple Life

Hong Kong 2011

Director: Ann Hui

*A Simple Life* is our Film of the Month  
and is reviewed on page 50

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Roger Lee  
Chan Pui-wah  
Ann Hui

**Written by**  
Susan Chan  
Roger Lee

**Director of Photography**  
Yu Lik-wai

**Editing by**  
Kwong Chi-leung

**Production Designer**  
Albert Poon

**Music**  
Law Wing-fai

**Sound**  
Tu Duu-chih

**Costume Designer**  
Boey Wong

**Wang Fuli**

Roger's mother  
**Anthony Wong**  
care home manager

**Qin Hailu**

Nurse Choi

**Eman Lam**

Carmen

**Hui Bik Kee**

Aunt Kam

**Chin Pei**

Uncle Kin

**Hui So Ying**

Mui Gu

**Elena Kong**

Angelababy

**Jason Chan**

Jason

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
Subtitles

**Distributor**  
Arrow Films

**ft frames**

Chinese theatrical title  
**Tao jie**

©[TBC]

**Production Companies**

Bona Entertainment  
Co., Focus Films,  
Sil-Metropole  
Organization present  
**Executive Producers**  
Andy Lau  
Song Dai  
Yu Dong

## CAST

**Andy Lau**  
Roger Leung  
**Deanie Ip**  
Ah Tao, 'Sister Peach'

## SYNOPSIS Hong Kong, the present.

Ah Tao, aka Sister Peach, has served the same family as a housekeeper for over 60 years, but now that most of the family have emigrated to the USA, she is left looking after grown-up singleton Roger, a producer busy working in the Chinese film industry. Tao is thrifty and old-fashioned, always looking for a bargain in the food markets, and always cautioning Roger about his health. Her cooking is celebrated and the flat is always immaculately clean. But the roles are reversed when, one evening, Roger returns to find that she has suffered from a stroke. Rushed to hospital, she announces a wish to retire.

Tao refuses to accept any financial help from Roger, who reluctantly finds her a place in a less than salubrious nursing home. Back at the flat, Roger has absolutely no idea how to look after himself. After a rocky start, Tao settles in and is visited by Roger's mother and sister – though it's only Roger she really wants to see. Roger tries to find a replacement for Tao, and allows her to interview some lacklustre girls, but no one comes up to scratch. Tao expresses the hope that Roger will marry, and tries to push in his direction a female doctor at the nursing home.

After Tao suffers another stroke, Roger leaves an instruction with the hospital; if she dies while he's away on business, they should put her in the mortuary until he returns. She dies. A funeral is held.

# Something from Nothing The Art of Rap

United Kingdom/USA 2012

Director: Ice-T

The hip-hop artist Ice-T is something of a rap renaissance man. A successful rapper in the 1980s, he has expanded into acting and TV presenting and has also become (through his heavy-metal band Body Count) a controversial rock star, but now the rap polymath tackles his first film as director. The subject – the art of rapping – is a surefooted choice for his debut and he wisely sticks closely to the topic. Having stated that rap music saved his life, he travels across the US to ask other rap stars what the artform means to them.

In its structure and delivery, the documentary seems to have been constructed like a well-written rap song. It has a rigid focus on the central premise but allows the filmmaker and his interviewees to riff around the subject. In this respect, *Something from Nothing* differs from other hip-hop documentaries: where previous films, such as *Rhyme & Reason* (1997) and *Scratch* (2001), examined the breadth and depth of hip-hop's origins, this concentrates almost exclusively on the verbal skill of rapping. It differs too from its closest predecessor – Kevin Fitzgerald's *Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme* (2000) – by having little interest in showcasing improvised, or freestyle, rapping. Instead Ice-T wants to understand the ways in which rappers shape their rhymes, crafting lyrics into well-constructed verses. At one point West Coast producer Dr Dre indicates that he respects rappers who also understand songwriting and the film implicitly shares this judgement, concentrating on the most commercially successful yet well-regarded artists in the history of rap music.

This singular approach has its rewards. Ice-T's interviews are like gold for fans of hip-hop, who will covet the film for moments such as Rakim's intricate explanation of the way he constructs a 16-bar verse, or Chuck D's confession of being heckled by Melle Mel. It's a mark of the director's stature within the hip-hop community that he's able to talk with such ease to so many of rap music's stars. He sticks to a fairly consistent range of questions about technique, influences and individual experiences, and his personable approach encourages his interviewees to share their love for the musical form that has brought them fame. In fact, part of the pleasure for fans of the genre is in watching the artists – from Run DMC to Kanye West – reflecting not only on their own achievements but also sharing their admiration for the lyrics and songs of other performers.

However, in assembling an impressive list of rap names the film almost invites the audience to note the omissions: Jay-Z is the biggest contemporary hip-hop figure not to be included, while LL Cool J, Busta Rhymes and members of the Wu-Tang Clan are also notable by their absence. Moreover, the film completely overlooks rap from the





Go with the flow: Eminem

◀ Southern states and in so doing fails to give some of the major stars of the 2000s – including OutKast and Lil' Wayne – a chance to contribute. Most significantly, the wider political and social implications of hip-hop and rap music are left almost completely unexplored. For example, discussion of misogynistic, violent and racially aggressive language would seem to be an obvious area for the film to analyse but it's left largely untouched. This lack of provocation may surprise those who remember Ice-T's 'Cop Killer' controversy, or his attack on Tipper Gore's PMRC (Parents Music Resource Center) in the song 'Freedom of Speech', but it gives us a clue about where the heart of the film really lies. At one point the rapper Nas tells Ice-T that hip-hop is still unaccepted as an artform by the mainstream. With *Something from Nothing*, Ice-T is attempting to rectify that. ♦♦ Dylan Cave

## CREDITS

**Co-director**  
Andy Baybutt  
**Producer**  
Paul Toogood  
**Cinematography**  
Jeremy Hewson  
Andy Baybutt  
John Halliday  
**Editor**  
Kieran Smyth  
**Sound**  
Michael Valesco  
Chris John Scott  
Sean O'Neil  
Chris Lebert  
Diako Diakoff  
Philip Shipman  
Adam Titzer Ariel Loh

©The Art Of Rap  
Films LTD

**Production Companies**  
Jollygoodfilms,  
Westmount Films  
and Final Level  
Entertainment present  
**Executive Producers**  
Ice-T  
Paul Toogood  
Jorge Hinojosa  
Alison Toogood  
Simon D. Pearce  
David Kaplan  
**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
**Distributor**  
Kaleidoscope Film  
Distribution

**SYNOPSIS** A documentary about the art of rapping. Rapper Ice-T travels to New York, Detroit and LA to interview successful rap artists including Melle Mel, Chuck D, Snoop Dogg and Eminem to discover what rap means to them. Interviewees offer their personal take on the musical form, and many perform for the camera.

# The Soul of Flies

Spain 2009-2011

Director: Jonathan Cenxual Burley

In his debut feature, Jonathan Cenxual Burley doesn't opt for the more obvious tropes of the road movie. Instead of expansive motorways, high-speed action and sexual awakenings, this quirky tale of two contrasting half-brothers who meet for the first time en route to the funeral of their father – the gloriously named Evaristo de la Sierra – delivers an incongruent humour of puckish excess where narrative plausibility and cause-and-effect logic have no discernible place.

The errant Evaristo first appears in a sepia-hued prologue, framed against the melancholy crooning of tango legend Carlos Gardel, as an old man looking back at an album of photographs and preparing to send off letters to the two sons he never knew. Miguel (Javier Sáez, the film's only professional actor) is uptight, cynical and trapped in a failing marriage, while his Italian free-spirited brother Nero (musician and graphic designer Andrea Calabrese) celebrates their drawn-out expedition as a sign that they are destined to get to know each other better.

The journey to the isolated church where the funeral is due to take place involves a trip (and here there's a nod to tripping in the hallucinogenic sense of the word) across an arid Castile reconfigured as a mythical yellow brick road of golden fields. Shot in Salamanca's La Armuña with a single camera and a lean production team of seven (also doubling up as cast members), Cenxual Burley's film is structured across a range of erratic detours. The duo are assaulted by flying watermelons catapulted on to a car windscreen by the chauffeur's sullen daughter, determined to liven up the countryside by splattering the fruit's pink flesh across the parched landscape. They encounter a range of outlandish personalities – a narcoleptic with suicidal tendencies, the ghost of their defiant father, an Italian priest sporting a Che Guevara beret – and, in veritable coming-of-age manner, the process allows the siblings to come to terms with their fears and foibles.

The director's own family have plum cameo roles – his father is the driver of the battered burgundy Volkswagen that rescues the two brothers from the abandoned train station and drops them off en route to the small rural town where Evaristo is to be buried. His grandmother offers a very funny variation on Chus Lampreave's singular granny in Almodóvar's *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (1984), as the widowed Angustias waiting at the end of a payphone by the church for news of the intrepid duo's not-quite-so-imminent arrival.

There is something Beckettian in the two men's journey – these are the tramps of *Waiting for Godot* refracted through the dual lens of absurdism and magic realism. Exhausted from walking, they find a red sofa to sit on in the rural outdoors; they march through the empty fields to the sound of crickets humming, with



Brothers grim: Javier Sáez, Andrea Calabrese

a crepuscular sky forming a mutating backdrop to the action; a musical band of thieves are framed against dramatic skies in a sequence that evokes the *danse macabre* of Bergman's *The Seventh Seal* (1957). Music is both diegetic – Nero strums a guitar and sings while dreaming of a girl with sunflowers in her hair, a band of thieves who pounce on the brothers play a range of percussive instruments – but it also functions as a further character, reinforcing mood and momentum. Composer Tim Walters, from the band Monsters Build Mean Robots, proffers a mischievous percussive soundtrack that underscores much of the action. The gentle strumming of an acoustic guitar accompanies the siblings as they step into the bar-cum-saloon

where they stand up for the depressed, narcoleptic Federico; it accelerates into a jubilant folk-infused number as his bully is outwitted and Federico dances in elation at finding a reason to stay awake. Music both propels the action forwards and invites reflection from the viewer.

Cenxual Burley isn't afraid to ask big questions about the meaning of life, death and the universe but it's all undertaken with the impish spirit of Kaurismäki and Berlanga hovering playfully over the film. In an age when everybody is in a hurry to get somewhere fast, the splendidly entertaining *The Soul of Flies* celebrates the need to take one's time and just go with the flow.

♦♦ María Delgado

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Jonathan Cenxual Burley  
**Written by**  
Luis Cenxual Burley  
**Director of Photography**  
Jonathan Cenxual Burley  
**Editor**  
Jonathan Cenxual Burley  
**Music**  
Tim Walters  
Andrea Calabrese  
**Sound Post**  
**Production**  
Jaroslav Bobrovsky

©Jonathan Cenxual Burley  
**Production Company**  
El Mallan Films  
A film by Jonathan Cenxual Burley  
**Executive Producer**  
Jane Burley

## CAST

**Andrea Calabrese**  
Nero de la Sierra  
**Javier Sáez**  
Miguel de la Sierra  
**Felix Cenxual**  
Evaristo de la Sierra  
**Luis Cenxual**  
driver  
**Francisca Lucas**  
Señora Angustias

**Miriam Montero**  
Sofia  
**Diana Pintado**  
sunflowers girl  
**Norberto Gutiérrez**  
Federico, musician  
**Antonio el Alcalde**  
waiter  
**Eduardo Hernández**  
Ignacio, musician  
**Jonathan Cenxual Burley**  
narrator/musician  
**Innocenzo Di Lisi**  
priest, musician

**Distributor**  
El Mallan  
  
Spanish theatrical title  
**El alma de las moscas**

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
Subtitles

**SYNOPSIS** Rural Spain, the present. A voiceover announces that on the day of his death Evaristo de la Sierra, a restless traveller and philanderer who has spent his life on the run from commitment, writes to the two sons he has never met, Miguel and Nero, inviting them to his funeral.

The two half-brothers meet for the first time at an abandoned train station. They are driven part way to the funeral, encountering the chauffeur's watermelon-throwing daughter en route. Nero dreams of a girl with sunflowers in her hair. Later he speculates on whether dogs have souls but emphatically argues that flies are too tiny to house a soul. The siblings rescue a suicidal narcoleptic, Federico, encouraging him to stand up to a local bully. They meet the ghost of their dead father, Miguel confesses that his wife has asked for a divorce, and Nero tells his brother the story of the man who perspired flowers. Nero spots the sunflower girl of his dreams and the siblings are surrounded by a musical band of thieves.

The now contrite thieves accompany the brothers to the funeral. The siblings arrive at the church with the musical troupe in tow and leave together at the end of the funeral in search of the sunflower girl and new adventures.



## Artificial Eye

# New Titles on DVD and Blu-ray



### Wong Kar Wai **Fallen Angels**

A disillusioned killer embarks on his last hit but first he has to overcome his affections for his cool, detached partner. Against the sordid and surreal urban nightscape (set in contemporary Hong Kong), he crosses paths with a strange drifter looking for her mysterious ex-boyfriend.

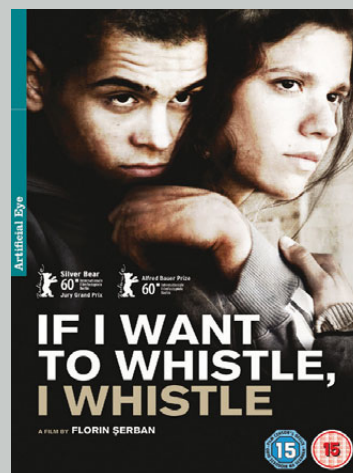
● Out on DVD and Blu-ray 6 August



### Malgoska Szumowska **Elles**

Juliette Binoche shines in this brutal and frank portrayal of a journalist who, during her investigations encounters two young students who use their bodies as a way to make money.

● Out on DVD and Blu-ray 20 August



### Florin Serban **If I Want to Whistle, I Whistle**

Silver Bear Grand Jury Award winner at the 2010 Berlin Film Festival, it tells the story of Silviu and his last five days before his release from a juvenile detention centre.

● Out on DVD 20 August

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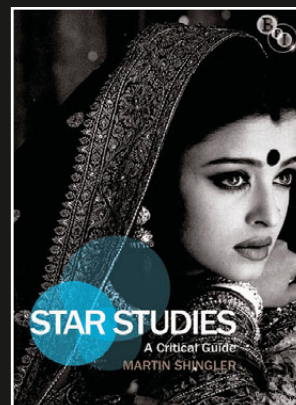
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# Storage 24

United Kingdom/USA 2012

Director: Johannes Roberts

Certificate 15 86m 59s

Viewers who recently complained that Ridley Scott's unofficial *Alien* prequel *Prometheus* lacked the slasher-style scares that made the director's original 'haunted house in space' so terrifyingly memorable might well find both solution and antidote to their *Alien* obsessions in Johannes Roberts's *Storage 24*. Roberts's previous feature *F* (2010) established his faculty with claustrophobic cat-and-mouse and unpleasant gore, so *Storage 24*'s setting in a Battersea self-storage building, complete with half-lit corridors, labyrinthine ventilation shafts and a cobwebbed basement, places the director right in his element, especially when he's pitting a group of haplessly trapped humans against a predatory extraterrestrial monster. Roberts and his DP Tim Siddell favour tight close-ups to ramp up the tension but don't shy away from fully revealing their creature – an anthropoid abomination of teeth, claws and practical and CG effects.

So while *Storage 24* makes for slickly competent SF horror, it suffers, as perhaps its very title implies, from a by-the-numbers approach to *Alien*-style materials that have already been revisited since 1979 in a dizzying surfeit of sequels, spinoffs and ripoffs. What most obviously distinguishes the film from the many other entries in this subgenre is its Britishness; but while Joe Cornish's similarly British *Attack the Block* (2011) used interplanetary invaders as a mirror to the alienation and beleaguered aggression of South London's urban underclass, *Storage 24* engages so little with the sociopolitical specificities of its metropolitan setting that it might just as easily have been set in another country – or indeed in space.

Offsetting all the murderous mayhem in the dark is the character arc of Charlie, played by the ubiquitous Noel Clarke (who also produced and had the original idea for the screenplay). Devastated at having been dumped by long-term girlfriend Shelley (Antonia Campbell-Hughes), Charlie is spoiling for a fight. "If she says one word..." he tells his friend Mark (Colin O'Donoghue) – and even

if the masking-tape dispenser that he brandishes like a gun renders the threat banally ridiculous (in a film that is often very funny), his rage is palpable. Charlie will gradually learn to let go of Shelley, but at the same time his hatred and aggression are merely transferred to the creature itself. Significantly, just as he gave Shelley a stuffed monkey on their first date, so Charlie's first contact with the alien is expressed through a toy animal. Pent up even before he gets locked into *Storage 24*, Charlie finds the path to physical and emotional release in burning, pummelling and skewering a monster that, like Shelley only more literally, tears men's hearts out. Meanwhile eccentric David (Ned Dennehy), self-exiled in the facility to escape his "poisonous whore" ex-wife, makes the film's link between women and aliens explicit by confronting the creature with the words: "You're just like my wife." It is a disquieting strand of misogyny in a film too focused on its male lead to make much of its female characters. If *Alien* brought feminism (of sorts) to horror, *Storage 24* represents an uncomfortable regression.

♦♦ Anton Bitel

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Manu Kumaran  
Noel Clarke  
**Screenplay**  
Johannes Roberts  
Davie Fairbanks  
Marc Small  
Noel Clarke  
**Original Idea**  
Noel Clarke

**Director of Photography**  
Tim Siddell  
**Editor**  
Martin Brinkler  
**Production Designer**  
Malin Lindholm  
**Music**  
Christian Henson  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Julian Willson  
**Costume Designers**  
Andy Blake  
Miss Molly

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Unstoppable Limited  
**Production Companies**  
Universal Pictures  
presents in association  
with Mediant and  
Unstoppable  
Entertainment A Big  
Yellow Films production  
Executive Producers  
Pankaj Rajani

Johnny Fewings  
Josh Varney  
Pankaj Kapoor

## CAST

**Noel Clarke**  
Charlie  
**Colin O'Donoghue**  
Mark  
**Antonia Campbell-Hughes**  
Shelley  
**Laura Haddock**  
Nikki  
**Jamie Thomas King**  
Chris  
**Ned Dennehy**  
David  
**Geoff Bell**  
Bob  
**Alex Price**  
Jake  
**Ruth Gemmill**  
Sarah  
**Davie Fairbanks**  
Greg  
**Amy Pemberton**  
Lucy  
**Robert Freeman**  
the creature

In Colour

**Distributor**  
Universal Pictures  
International UK & Eire

7,828 ft +8 frames

# Strawberry Fields

United Kingdom 2011

Director: Frances Lea

Certificate 15 86m 50s

Director Frances Lea's low-budget feature places a love-triangle drama in a somewhat unlikely setting – the transitory world of seasonal fruit picking in Kent, transformed here into a heady, wild space outside the normal limits of society. When we first see Gillian (Anna Madeley), she is cycling through fertile fruit-picking terrain – a Kent country lane, sun-drenched to a hyperreal degree. The saturated colour palette is initially the backdrop for this withdrawn young woman's fumbling flirtations with the simmering Kev (Emun Elliott) as she joins him working in the titular strawberry fields on the farm her wanderings have brought her to. The bucolic rural landscape reflects this shy girl's internal world, her innocence and the possibilities of liberation. Only a few brief flashbacks suggest that all is not well with her.

When Gillian's eccentric sister Emily arrives on the scene she is a startling presence, almost immediately disrupting the clunkily written romance developing between the mismatched Gillian and Kev. The energy that Christine Bottomley pumps into the character kickstarts the film into a welcome higher gear, as her increasing levels of pleading and scheming begin to twist Gillian tighter and tighter – though the schizophrenic switching between giggling schoolgirl and Machiavellian siren eventually begins to feel schematic.

Emily's arrival signals a shift not only in the film's pace but also in its visual style. As Gillian endures emotional tortures at the hands of her disturbed sister, who demands she return to whatever bizarre arrangement the two previously had (the sisters' domestic situation, beyond the death of their parents, is unclear), the bright daylight is abandoned for moodier shades of dusk, the action shifting from sunny open fields to the gloomy, claustrophobic spaces of the farm sheds. It's here that some of the more powerful scenes – such as a bizarre and subtext-laden game of hide and seek between the sisters – take place. Lea's visual strategy is admittedly striking in its intensity and contrasts, if not a little obvious.

The Tennessee Williams-esque melodramatics never manage the same



Forbidden fruit: Anna Madeley

impact, however. The script, by Lea and Judith Johnson, only sporadically delivers a solid emotional punch and gives Bottomley more lively material than co-stars Madeley and Elliott. The murky events in the sisters' past are left ambiguous, the script never digging deeply enough under the surface of their weird relationship, which is as much frustrating as intriguing. Instead, we are left with a series of face-offs where Gillian's attempts to drive her sister away meet with mewling and insults from Emily, followed by unsophisticated mind games directed at Kev. By the time it all reaches fever pitch we have seen plenty of lust and love amid the beautifully shot fields, but nothing really new. ♦♦ Owen Van Spall

## CREDITS

**Producer**  
Liam Beatty  
Lucie Wenigerová  
**Written by**  
Judith Johnson  
Frances Lea  
**Director of Photography**  
Dave Miller  
**Editor**  
Cinzia Balderassi  
**Production Designer**  
John Bramble  
**Music Composed by**  
Bryony Afferson  
James Stone  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Nigel Albermannichie  
**Costume Designer**  
Emma Moore

©Spring Pictures (SF)  
Limited & Film London  
**Production Companies**  
Film London presents  
a Spring Pictures  
production  
A Microwave  
Film produced in  
association with BBC  
Films and Kent County  
Council Film Office

A Spring Pictures  
production  
A film by Frances Lea

## CAST

**Anna Madeley**  
Gillian  
**Christine Bottomley**  
Emily  
**Emun Elliott**  
Kev  
**Jonathan Bonnici**  
Fabio  
**Florence Bell**  
Sammy  
**Jack Roth**  
Ewan  
**Vanessa Babirye**  
Sabrina  
**Philip Martin Brown**  
Bob  
**Susan Park**  
Jane

In Colour  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Soda Pictures

7,815 ft +0 frames

**SYNOPSIS** Kent, present day. A young woman, Gillian, cycles through the countryside, ignoring her ringing mobile. Happening upon a strawberry farm that's hiring pickers, she gives her name as Tammy and takes up the offer of work. Another worker, Kev, is enthralled by her and makes advances. The two grow close as they work together.

Fellow picker Fabio answers the phone that Gillian has left unattended, and invites the caller to the farm. The caller, Emily, turns up at the farm in glamorous attire. She declares to the fruit pickers that Tammy is in fact Gillian, her sister, who has run away from home. The eccentric and unstable Emily immediately begins disrupting Kev and Gillian's romance and their relationships with the other farm workers. Emily pleads with Gillian to leave, tries to seduce Kev, and later claims that he attempted to rape her following an altercation. During an evening party on the nearby beach, Emily and Kev have aggressive sex following an argument, which Gillian witnesses. After a near-fatal physical struggle with her sister in a barn, Emily pours scalding water over herself. Gillian decides to leave both Kev and Emily.



# Swandown

United Kingdom 2012

Director: Andrew Kötting

Certificate 12A 98m 8s

If Andrew Kötting's latest feature-length jaunt proves anything, it's that it's virtually impossible to frame an uninteresting shot involving a swan-shaped two-man pedalo making its way by sea, river or canal. Pitched against the immensity of the English Channel, shrouded in early morning fog on the Medway, dwarfed by the Dartford Bridge, or even framed beside real swans on a Hackney waterway, this flat-bottomed, long-necked vision in white plastic moulding is a sight which invariably raises a smile. As Kötting and his co-pilot Iain Sinclair take to this ever-incongruous craft for their self-powered voyage of discovery from Hastings to the Olympic park in east London, unpredictable multimedia mischief-maker Kötting seems to have come up with another endearingly off-kilter offering, falling somewhere between spontaneous happening, themed essay film and documentary record.

Kötting has already used the outline of a journey before as a way to link up significant and eccentric encounters, notably in 1997's *Gallivant*, in which three generations of his family skirted the British coastline, a trip the director used as a vehicle for exploring the curlicues of familial and national identity. That personal element, which has informed some of Kötting's most lauded work – including the affecting valediction *In the Wake of A Dea* (2006) and *This Our Still Life* (2011), a portrait of daughter Eden and her struggle with debilitating Joubert syndrome – is absent in *Swandown*, replaced by a sort of creative congruence with his fellow traveller Sinclair, the dedicated and encyclopaedically informed psychogeographer of London's intriguing edgelands and beyond.

Both of them are interested in venturing off the beaten track, in exploring the spirit of place and what that might tell us about the past uncovered within, and both also convey a fascination with the minutiae of the odd and unusual as a sort of counterblast against the processed, conventional mass-media onslaught that surrounds us. A productive combination, you would think, yet while the prospect of their mad-yet-somehow-sane quest undoubtedly grabs attention, the course of the journey is somehow never as meaningful or even as amusing as one might hope.

That's always a risk with Kötting's on-the-hoof methodology, which sets out with the notion that the unplanned bumps and scrapes that occur along the way are where the magic will happen, and you just have to trust that it does. In this instance however, there's an element of forcing the issue by having invited participants making their contribution, and although graphic novelist Alan Moore and comedian Stewart Lee in particular try their best to express what Kötting and Sinclair's endeavour is all about, the overall conceit remains intractably amorphous while the rest of the guest list (actor Dudley Sutton and artist Marcia Farquhar made the final



Fantastic voyage: 'Swandown'

cut, the likes of Kötting's daughter Eden and artist Dinos Chapman did not) offer fairly forgettable bit-parts. There is one comically effective aside where a red-braced handyman advises Kötting that the rat bite on his leg could well be fatal if he gets salt water in it, but often the interaction with the great British public never really sparks, maybe because all that shouting from bank to mid-stream somehow flattens the spontaneity.

What one misses most of all is a sense of cut and thrust between Kötting and Sinclair themselves. For all the talk of the transformative effect of the journey about to be undertaken, there's not much sense that they or we are changed by the odyssey, since, essentially, Sinclair delivers his characteristically

erudite wordsmithery, railing against the Olympics for what it's done to his beloved outlands of east London, and his shipmate stands by admiring him. This is understandable in the circumstances, though it leaves Kötting a bit like a passenger in his own film, which feels somehow less personal, less alive as a result. It doesn't make him any less of a national treasure, it must be said, yet in terms of the purely filmic artefact (as opposed to the associated installation and personal appearances), for all its endearing daffiness *Swandown* doesn't quite resonate with the same degree of intellectual provocation and emotional impact that his strongest work has delivered.

♦♦ Trevor Johnston

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Lisa Marie Russo  
**Writing and**  
**Plottings by**  
Andrew Kötting  
Iain Sinclair  
**Director of**  
**Photography**  
Nick Gordon Smith  
**Editor**  
Cliff West  
**Music**  
Jem Finer  
**Sound Design**  
Philippe Clompi

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**Production Companies**  
BFI presents in association with Britdoc and Channel 4, Abandon Normal Devices, Cornerhouse Artist Film, Screen South a Fly Film production  
A film by Andrew Kötting  
Supported by Britdoc and Channel 4, Abandon Normal

Devices Festival and Cornerhouse Artist Film  
Enabled in part by Screen South and the Rife Lottery and NSSP Funding Programme  
Made with the support of the BFI's Film Fund  
**Executive Producers**  
Kate Ogborn  
Marc Munden

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Cornerhouse

8,832 ft +8 frames

**SYNOPSIS** Between September and October 2011, film-maker Andrew Kötting and writer Iain Sinclair man a swan-shaped pedalo on a would-be Homeric journey along the coast from Hastings, by way of various local rivers and canals, towards east London and the site of the Olympic Park. The film is a record of a journey which unfolded over several weeks, including various encounters with passing members of the public, and a series of special guest interventions including comedian Stewart Lee, writer Alan Moore and actor Dudley Sutton. Archive footage, plus literary readings and sundry vocal embellishments on the soundtrack, add to the texture as psychogeographer Sinclair provides a commentary on the changing landscape and its hidden ghosts and presences. He departs when the two reach the Thames, bound for a transatlantic flight, leaving Kötting to reflect on the value of their journey, not just as a quixotic tilt against the juggernaut of the Olympics, but as a unique experience in its own right.

# Ted

USA 2012

Director: Seth MacFarlane

Seth MacFarlane, aged 38, is already the creator of three successful primetime animated comedies – *Family Guy*, *American Dad!* and *The Cleveland Show* – and has recently announced his intention to add a revamped *Flintstones* to his résumé. With *Ted*, he also becomes the latest of America's 'adult' animators to make the transition to feature-length filmmaking: Trey Parker and Matt Stone of *South Park* started out there with *Cannibal! The Musical*; Matt Groening's *The Simpsons Movie* arrived belatedly; and *Beavis and Butt-Head* and *King of the Hill* creator Mike Judge, quietly amassing a body of work that marks him as the sharpest screen satirist of the past 20 years, has three live-action features under his belt.

MacFarlane's *Ted* is the story of a triangular affair between 35-year-old John, his foul-mouthed talking teddy bear, voiced by MacFarlane, and John's long-suffering girlfriend Lori, played by Mila Kunis (with Joel McHale in the mix as Lori's predatory boss, waiting for her to shake John loose). A tale of protracted male adolescence and bros-versus-hos ethics – also the subject of seemingly every other American screen comedy of the 21st century – it's a film that relies on the comic potential of random squibs of pop culture, all-in-good-fun offensiveness and state-of-the-art dirty puppet humour à la Peter Jackson's *Meet the Feebles* (1989). Like all MacFarlane's work, it is untrammelled by any trace of sophistication and is sporadically funny, thanks mostly to Mark Wahlberg's bent straight-man performance as John, memorably rattling off white-trash girl names like an auctioneer, or winning Lori over with deadpan shock-value jokes (turning down a ride from her: "It's okay. If I get raped it's my fault for what I'm wearing"). It's good for about three and a half solid laughs – but is that all there is?

"Because it's a cartoon, there's enough distance that we can get away with it," writer-producer David Mirkin once said, comparing his tenure on *The Simpsons*, now entering its 23rd season, to his previous job on the shortlived madcap sitcom *Get a Life*. "We could do very, very dark things and everybody goes, 'Oh, there's another cute cartoon.'"

MacFarlane has used the licence allowed by cartoon and caricature principally to satisfy his predilection for vulgar jokes and pop trivia. Despite his enormous popular success, or perhaps partially because of it, he has never received the critical consideration of Parker, Stone, Groening or Judge, precisely because he isn't a satirist. MacFarlane is instead a benevolent class clown, a well-adjusted average-Joe participant in the American scene, his mind a rummage sale of cultural detritus that's as comfortably familiar as, say, a well-worn teddy bear. He relates to pop culture in a manner that's almost entirely uncritical, stuffing his work with non-sequitur references – *Family Guy*'s repeated "Hey Lois, remember the time..." cutaway gags, peeks into





Bad news bear: Mark Wahlberg

← patriarch Peter Griffin's TV-tainted memory – falling back time and again on 'punchlines' in which the reference is the entire joke, gratifying the viewer for sharing MacFarlane's Gen-X sci-fi nerd knowledge. In the blithe bigotry of *Family Guy*'s Peter, which carries over, along with MacFarlane's unmistakable New England honk, to the animate plushie in *Ted*, there is no sense of any underlying social criticism, but at most a bemusement at the very existence of bigotry. Compare this to the season-eight *Simpsons* episode 'Homer's Phobia', still a fairly gutty bit of TV for 1997. Furthering the comparison, I have just been perusing 'A Visual History of Literary References on *The Simpsons*' on the website of *The Atlantic*; one cannot imagine a similar list being compiled for MacFarlane's shows, which have no equivalent highbrow-lowbrow breadth. This may suggest an element of elitism in responses to MacFarlane's work – witness the visible recoil when the hip-credentialed comedian Louis C.K. outed himself as a *Family Guy* viewer.

MacFarlane's brand of cuddly loutishness is, regardless, a force to be reckoned with, and *Ted* could easily be another hit for him, in a new medium. Until he abandons his security blanket of pop irreverence, however, he's a teddy bear without teeth. ♥ Nick Pinkerton

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Scott Stuber  
Seth MacFarlane  
John Jacobs  
Jason Clark  
**Screenplay**  
Seth MacFarlane  
Alec Sulkin  
Wellesley Wild  
**Story**  
Seth MacFarlane  
**Director of Photography**  
Michael Barrett  
**Editor**  
Jeff Freeman  
**Production Designer**  
Stephen Lineweaver  
**Music**  
Walter Murphy  
**Production Sound Mixer**  
Tom Williams  
**Costume Designer**  
Debra McGuire  
**Character Animation/Visual Effects**  
Tippett Studio  
**Visual Effects**  
Iloura

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**Production Companies**  
Universal Pictures  
and Media Rights  
Capital present a Fuzzy  
Door production  
A Bluegrass Films  
production  
A Smart Entertainment  
production  
A film by Seth

MacFarlane  
**Executive Producer**  
Jonathan Mone  
**Film Extracts**  
*Flash Gordon* (1980)

## CAST

**Mark Wahlberg**  
John Bennett  
**Mila Kunis**  
Lori Collins  
**Seth MacFarlane**  
voice of Ted  
**Joel McHale**  
Rex  
**Giovanni Ribisi**  
Donny  
**Bill Smitrovich**  
Frank  
**Mark Walsh**  
Thomas  
**Laura Vandervoort**  
Tanya  
**Jessica Stroup**  
Tracy  
**Ginger Gonzaga**  
Gina  
**Melissa Ordway**  
Michelle  
**Patrick Warburton**  
Guy  
**Patrick Stewart**  
narrator  
**Sam Jones**  
himself

**Dolby Digital/DTS/SDS**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Universal Pictures  
International UK & Eire

# Tortoise in Love

United Kingdom 2011  
Director: Guy Browning  
Certificate 12A 84m 13s

Kingston Bagpuize might sound like a place name dreamed up by Matt Lucas and David Walliams but it is in fact a real Oxfordshire village; and though an ironic Tom Baker-style voiceover narration also hints at the influence of *Little Britain* on this cheap-and-cheerful feature debut, the comedy is of a distinctly less subversive stripe. Unless *Tortoise in Love* can be deemed subversive by its own utter conventionality – certainly its seaside-postcard gags and its warm embrace of the hoariest of gender stereotypes lend it a near-surreal quality at times. Elsewhere, it fails by leaning on cliché or simple dullardry; an exchange that goes, "There are plenty more fish in the sea", "But I don't want to go out with a fish" should not have made it past a single script meeting.

This lack of rigour in the quality of the writing – and the supporting performances – is a common affliction among films that have been independently financed and produced as a labour of love, and this very much has; backed by corporate sponsors, the village of Kingston Bagpuize itself put its hand in its collective pocket and raised the budget. So if *Tortoise in Love* has the blithely conventional perkiness and daffy lowest-common-denominator humour of a village-hall Christmas show, that's because it more or less is one – albeit with considerably higher production values.

Thematically and stylistically, it nods vigorously to Richard Curtis, not just in the country-house setting and the will-they-won't-they plot (slow-moving gardener Tom fails to pursue Polish au pair Anya) but also in the lead performance of Tom Mitchelson, a double-take-worthy spit for the young Hugh Grant. Unlike Curtis, however, writer-director Guy Browning makes a heavy point about not fawning over wealth: the father of Anya's charge Harry is a soulless, horrible banker, his salt-of-the-earth employees all decency. Such progressiveness is not matched by the film's attitude to women: the script so frequently presents men



The village: Tom Yates, Lesley Staples

being conned, harried, manipulated and bullied by women that one hardly blames young Tom for his paralysis in the face of love. Anya's female friends favour conversation topics that Carrie Bradshaw would reject as too trivial ("How are men like cake?"). The men of the village, meanwhile, share the sort of paranoia about women that preceded a certain little experiment in Stepford, Connecticut: "Tactically, women are the enemy," they intone to Tom; and, "Always let them think they're in control." In a curious moment during the village fete's 'Husband Obedience Trials' (in which men are tested for sitcom-grade 'male' failings), Browning has a bystander gasp, "This is the worst kind of sexism!" She's right, it is, and it's matched throughout the film. One wonders why Browning felt the need to point this up, when it so obviously mars an otherwise nobly undertaken and occasionally quite charming little film. ♥ Hannah McGill

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Steffan Aquarone  
**Written by**  
Guy Browning  
**Director of Photography**  
Balazs Bolygo  
**Editor**  
David Stephenson  
**Production Design**  
Jan Carlisle  
**Music**  
Geoff Cottrell  
**Sound Recordist**  
Ed Borgnis

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Productions  
**Production Companies**  
KBS Films presents an  
Immense production  
A Guy Browning film

## CAST

**Tom Mitchelson**  
Tom  
**Alice Zawadzki**

Anya  
**Tom Yates**  
Harry  
**Toby Longworth**  
narrator  
**Ingrid Evans**  
Ursula Betteridge  
**Dominic Gaskell**  
Sandpaper Morris  
**Tracy Bargeat**  
Alison  
**Duncan Armitage**  
Jason Grandage  
**Sue Parker-Nutley**  
Janet Hardcastle  
**Mike Kemp**  
Albert  
**Lucy Aitken**  
Lucinda Grandage  
**Philip Herbert**  
Bob Hardcastle  
**Lesley Staples**  
Mrs Summers

**In Colour**  
[2.35:1]

**Distributor**  
Immense Productions  
7,579 ft +8 frames

**SYNOPSIS** The village of Kingston Bagpuize, Oxfordshire, the present. Harry Grandage returns home from boarding school for the holidays. Twentysomething microbiologist Tom Cobham, who's been living in London for three years, also returns home to the village. Harry's wealthy but neglectful banker father appoints a Polish au pair, Anya, to take care of him. Tom takes a gardening job at the Grandage house, where he glimpses gamekeeper Jack Partridge, who has lived in isolation since accidentally shooting and killing Harry's grandfather. Tom develops a crush on Anya; though his interest is reciprocated, he proves too shy to ask her out. The whole village invests in the courtship, or absence thereof. For the village fete, Tom enlists some of the men to participate in a riotous pantomime horse race. Harry goes back to school and Anya returns to Poland. Tom mopes through the winter, until Anya writes to say she's returning in the summer. This time Tom's fete spectacle is 'Husband Obedience Trials', featuring local men in drag playing shrewish wives. To Harry's delight, Tom succeeds in bringing the Red Arrows to the fete, with the help of Jack, a former pilot. Jack shows himself at the pub and is warmly welcomed. A plan to thrust Tom and Anya together fails when she's preoccupied looking after Harry. Eventually Tom's friend Brendan asks Anya out, and she accepts; Tom counters by asking her friend Jane out. But before the planned double date, Harry entices Tom and Anya to his treehouse and locks them in. Finally, they kiss.





Pitch perfect: 'Undeclared'

## Undeclared

USA/United Kingdom 2011

Directors: Dan Lindsay, TJ Martin

You could stick a pin just about anywhere in Daniel Lindsay and T.J. Martin's (deservedly) Oscar-winning documentary *Undeclared* and hit upon a beauty of a quote from Bill Courtney, the dogged, determined, big-hearted volunteer football coach at Manassas High School, North Memphis, a man whose reserves of optimism and decency and pep-talking eloquence fill almost every frame of the film.

When we first meet Bill and his players it's 2009 and the Manassas Tigers haven't won a game since who knows when. Demoralised, undisciplined and underfunded, the all-black team has been reduced to playing 'pay games' against better-supported sides, bussed into richer suburbs to get whupped and sent home with a pizza and a cheque for a few thousand dollars. Not that funding is really Bill's main worry, what with a bunch of his key players either arrested or shot: "Most coaches, that would be pretty much a career's worth of crap to deal with... I think that sums up the last two weeks for me."

As the Tigers progress through the season and head for the all-important playoffs, three of the players emerge as the film's focus: 22-stone softie OC Brown (the team's star player), underdog right tackle Montrail ('Money') and troubled Chavis, fresh out of junior penitentiary and wrestling with major anger issues. "Rarely do coaches come back and go through all the stress and headaches for all the team," says Bill. "It's typically one or two who mean so much to you that you're willing to put up with it." That Courtney and fellow coach Mike Ray care about these young men is obvious, and all but the most hard-hearted viewer will do too by the film's finale, a nail-biting close-shave game that plays out like a Hollywood sports movie.

At moments *Undeclared* seems incredibly intimate, the camera moving in close on tears and hugs, but ultimately it's the wider picture that resonates. Although the film ends on a generally upbeat note, certainly more so than its obvious predecessor *Hoop Dreams* (1994), you can't help worrying about the Tigers it hasn't picked out, and what the future holds for them, and others like them, in this post-industrial part of Tennessee, left economically high and dry after the

closure of the Firestone tyre plant some years back. The film's implicit message is perhaps best summed up by OC, who's moved in with Mike Ray and his family while being tutored for college: "I had to get used to the neighbourhood. Everybody here got a car, you got people jogging..." Where he comes from, he says, "I if was to go jogging, people would think I'm running from the police."

◆ Jane Lamacraft

### CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Rich Middlemas  
Dan Lindsay  
Seth Gordon  
Ed Cunningham  
Glen Zipper  
**Directors of Photography**  
Dan Lindsay  
TJ Martin  
**Edited by**  
Dan Lindsay  
TJ Martin  
**Music**  
Michael Brook  
**Supervising Sound Editor/**  
**Re-recording Mixer**  
Elmo Weber

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**Production Companies**  
The Weinstein Company presents  
Exclusive Media Group & Zipper Brothers films present a Spitfire Pictures production

in association with  
Level 22 Productions  
and Five Smooth Stones Productions  
A film by Dan Lindsay & TJ Martin  
**Executive Producers**  
Ralph Zipper  
Nigel Sinclair  
Guy East  
Chris Miller  
Neeraj Kohli  
Paolo Coppola  
Jillian Longnecker  
Michele Farinola

**Dolby Digital**  
**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]

**Distributor**  
Dogwoof

**SYNOPSIS** A documentary following Memphis businessman Bill Courtney, a volunteer coach at Manassas High School, as he guides the school's football team, the Manassas Tigers, through the 2009 season. The Tigers haven't won a game in more than a decade and the players face problems both on and off the pitch: Montrail has recently lost his father; star player OC struggles to get the academic grades he needs to go to college; Chavis is returning to the team following a 15-month spell in a juvenile penitentiary. Other players have been arrested or even shot. Under the guidance of Courtney and fellow coach Mike Ray, the Tigers qualify for the playoffs, but narrowly lose to Westview. OC achieves adequate grades and signs for Southern Mississippi University; a well-wisher funds Montrail's college education. Courtney gives up coaching the Tigers to spend more time with his own children.

## Wagner's Dream

USA 2012

Director: Susan Froemke

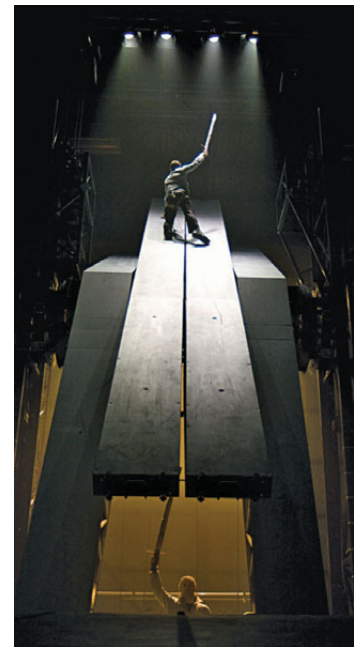
Certificate U 114m 2s

Productions of grand opera, and Wagnerian grand opera especially, are often subject to attacks of acute designeritis, as witness the recent Bayreuth production of *Lohengrin*, which was set, for no discernible reason, in a scientific laboratory with the chorus got up as giant rats. Robert Lepage's staging of the *Ring* cycle for the New York Met's 2010-11 season can't be accused of that kind of deranged wackiness; we're still in Wagner's mythological Nordic-Germanic world of gods, heroes and Valkyries, and swords and spears aren't replaced by Kalashnikovs or light-sabres. Instead Lepage, never known for lack of ambition either in his own plays or the sets he devises for other people's work, goes for sheer overweening immensity: a huge computer-controlled structure of two dozen massive angled planks which pivot and swivel, together or independently, on an axis that can rise and fall. Colours, shapes and images are projected on to the surface of the planks.

In filming the story of the production right from its initial conception in early 2008 to the eventual, highly controversial, four-opera stagings, director Susan Froemke claims to have been given unrestricted access both by Lepage and the Met's general manager Peter Gelb. It certainly seems that way. We hear a good many sceptical voices, not least from New York's always-vocal opera fans ("I don't wanna see a lightshow, I don't want pizzazz," grumps one), and see a whole string of glitches and setbacks. In order to support the vast contraption, weighing over 40 tons, the opera house has to be strengthened and reinforced, and even once it's been creaked and groaned into position doubts remain. "I need to be reassured, I'm getting stressed out," mutters Michel Gosselin, technical director of Lepage's Quebec-based design studio Ex Machina, who constructed the monster.

He's not the only one. Despite Lepage's assurances that it's "not a dangerous set", several of the singers are less than happy about the acrobatics they're asked to perform on the planks. "You tell me there was no danger," protests German bass Hans-Peter Koenig, singing Fafner, "but suddenly moved something what never moved before!" On the opening night of *Rheingold* the computer throws a wobbly and the rainbow bridge over which the gods should ascend to Valhalla stubbornly refuses to rise; and in *Die Walküre* soprano Deborah Voigt, singing Brünnhilde for the first time in her career, slips on the precipitous planks and falls on her very first entrance.

Live theatre being what it is, other crises unconnected with the set design erupt. Illness forces James Levine, the Met's longstanding principal conductor, to step down between *Walküre* and *Siegfried*; and three days before the latter is due to open, the designated Siegfried, Gary Lehman, also succumbs to illness



A night at the opera: 'Wagner's Dream'

and the young Texan Jay Hunter Morris steps in at short notice. (From what we see and hear, he acquits himself impressively.) But ultimately, with the premiere of *Götterdämmerung* in January 2012, the whole behemoth rumbles to its majestic, portentous conclusion. Not everyone's happy, of course; the press are still sniping, and one opera-goer is seen grumbling that the concept "takes away from what Wagner is – the power of nature". But a young couple, less jaded, come out enthusing. "If this is what opera is like, we want more!" Froemke's film, conveying the grandeur as well as the grandiosity of the entire enterprise, makes that kind of response credible. Oh, and the music helps, too. ◆ Philip Kemp

### CREDITS

**Produced by**  
Susan Froemke  
Bob Eisenhardt  
**Producer**  
Douglas Graves  
**Camera**  
Don Lenzner  
**Editor**  
Bob Eisenhardt  
**Sound**  
Roger Phenix

©The Metropolitan Opera

**Production Companies**  
With the support of  
The Link Foundation  
A film by Bob Eisenhardt & Susan Froemke

**In Colour**  
[1.85:1]  
**Part-subtitled**

**Distributor**  
The Metropolitan Opera  
**10,263 ft +0 frames**

**SYNOPSIS** For its 2010-11 season, the New York Metropolitan Opera mounts its most expensive production yet: Wagner's 16-hour *Ring* cycle, masterminded by the feted playwright and stage designer Robert Lepage. The film follows the production from its inception in January 2008, when Lepage, working with his Quebec-based design studio Ex Machina, plans a set of 24 massive computer-controlled pivoting planks on to which can be projected colours, images etc. We see its installation at the Met, the rehearsals and the premieres. Despite setbacks and audience scepticism, the production is finally – at least in some quarters – rated a triumph.



# Where Do We Go Now?

France/Lebanon/Egypt/Italy 2011  
 Director: Nadine Labaki  
 Certificate 12A 101m 48s

Director Nadine Labaki's 2007 debut feature *Caramel* received critical praise for capturing a rarely seen side of Lebanese daily life through the relationships of five women in a Beirut hair salon. Her eagerly anticipated follow-up *Where Do We Go Now?* is another sassy tribute to female camaraderie, and is more ambitious in political scope. Dedicated to mothers (she was pregnant when developing the script), it's set in the Wardeh region of Lebanon, in an isolated village with a Christian-Muslim divide, where the women hatch increasingly elaborate plots to prevent their men becoming embroiled in sectarian fighting. While addressing the human cost of such conflicts head-on, Labaki leavens her weighty message with humour, blending in fantastical elements and musical numbers. The resulting comedy-drama hybrid never quite feels at home in any one tone, but there's courage and vitality in the film's playfulness, and a humanistic commitment to social cohesion that it would be churlish not to applaud.

The film begins, like a fable, with a narrator inviting us to listen to "a long tale of women in black". We see a procession of mourning women returning from visiting their dead, clutching photos and thumping their hearts with their hands – a strikingly poetic image of life in a place where most men have been killed. Events then take a rollicking turn, however, as the women, tired of the violence, decide to take action, spearheaded by café-owning widow Amale (Labaki herself, as in *Caramel* ably taking the lead role) and mayor's wife Yvonne (Yvonne Maalouf). Resorting to sexual allure as their only effective means of gaining influence in their heavily patriarchal society, they echo the sex-withholding villagers of *Lysistrata*, as well as the protagonists of Radu Mihaileanu's modern revamp *The Source* (2011).

The humour is broad and populist, but the film is more subversively provocative than its amiable packaging would appear, striding into the midst of complex questions about where responsibility lies in any patriarchal, militaristic social structure, and whether female members can be dissidents. At one point Amale

passionately berates the village men as "animals", asking: "Do you think we exist simply to mourn you?" The sight of this public shaming of the men by a threateningly beautiful woman is bound to prompt kneejerk accusations of misandry, but Amale's rage is directed not at the perceived folly of men but rather at the futile binds of traditional expectations that endorse senseless killing.

Near the start of the film there is a musical fantasy interlude in which Amale (a Christian) and Muslim house-painter Rabihi (Julien Farhat) dance together and declare their love – it's a romantic daydream that, because of sectarianism, has not come true. The film's power is in its recognition that imagining alternatives is the way out of deadlock. After the women stage a fake miracle to trick the men, a statue of the Virgin, unseen by anyone but us, actually cries blood – a sign that the supposedly impossible can become real. It might seem a naive, escapist touch, but Labaki's open hope is surely wiser than decades of cynical belligerence.

◆◆ Carmen Gray

## CREDITS

**Producer**  
 Anne-Dominique  
 Toussaint  
**Screenplay**  
 Nadine Labaki  
 Jihad Houeily  
 Rodney Al Haddad  
 With the collaboration  
 of Thomas Bidegain  
**Director of  
 Photography**  
 Christophe Offenstein  
**Editor**  
 Véronique Lange  
**Set Design**  
 Cynthia Zahar  
**Music**  
 Khaïed Mouzanar  
**Sound**  
 Michel Casang  
 Gwennolé Le Borgne  
 Dominique Gaborieau  
**Costume Designer**  
 Caroline Labaki

©[TBC]  
**Production  
 Companies**  
 Anne-Dominique  
 Toussaint presents a  
 film by Nadine Labaki  
 Les Films des  
 Tournelles, Pathé, Les  
 Films de Beyrouth,  
 United Artistic Group,  
 Chaocorp, France 2  
 Cinéma, Prima TV  
 With the participation  
 of Canal +, Cinécinéma,  
 France Télévisions  
 With the support of  
 Ministry of Culture,  
 Lebanon, Fonds  
 Francophone,  
 Production  
 Audiovisuelle du Sud  
 In association with The  
 Doha Film Institute

Executive Producers  
 Lebanon  
 Lara Chekerdjian  
 Ginger Beirut  
 Productions:  
 Abila Khoury

## CAST

**Claude Baz  
 Moussawbaa**  
 Takla  
**Layla Hakim**  
 Aïat  
**Nadine Labaki**  
 Amale  
**Yvonne Maalouf**  
 Yvonne  
**Antoinette Noufaily**  
 Saydeh  
**Julien Farhat**  
 Rabihi  
**Ali Haidar**  
 Roukoz  
**Kevin Abboud**  
 Nassim  
**Petra Saghibini**  
 Rita  
**Mostafa al Sakka**  
 Hammoudi  
**Sasseen Kawzally**  
 Issam  
**Caroline Labaki**  
 Aida  
**Anjo Rihane**  
 Fatmeh

**In Colour**  
 [2.35:1]  
**Subtitles**

**Distributor**  
 Revolver Entertainment

**9,162 ft +0 frames**

French theatrical title  
**Et maintenant  
 on va où?**

# You've Been Trumped

United Kingdom 2011  
 Director: Anthony Baxter  
 Certificate PG 100m 33s

Like many recent films loosely included in the category of 'advocacy' documentaries, Anthony Baxter's *You've Been Trumped* – a fascinating examination of the disconcerting realities imposed on the once quiet duneland hamlets of Balmedie, Aberdeenshire, when the media roadshows and bulldozers marshalled by American tycoon Donald Trump come to town – inevitably begs larger, mainly political, questions.

Baxter's film (which comes garlanded with an impressive number of festival prizes) is a deceptively simple affair. Following, and befriending, in a more or less relaxed style, three families living near or on the coastal estate bought up by Trump, he slowly builds an easy, seemingly neutral appraisal of their lifestyles and characters.

The main interviewee is Michael Forbes, a 60-year-old ex-trawlerman who has become something of a local celebrity through his principled refusal to sell his small parcel of land – which happens to be smack in the middle of Trump's development plans. As Baxter shows, this stubborn man has proved far more of a thorn in Trump's side than any mere local planning law, eco-sustaining legislation or politician. Trump's scheme was refused in 2007, deemed incompatible with the interests of an area that has been awarded, as geomorphologist Dr Jim Hansom says in the film, "the highest conservation accolade this country can bestow", and bitterly opposed by such as the RSPB, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Wildlife Trust. The decision was reversed, however, by SNP leader and First Minister Alex Salmond. "They've done this country wrong," says Forbes. "They've given it away to the Americans." (There are clear echoes of Bill Forsyth's *Local Hero* here – with Trump as the Burt Lancaster figure and Forbes as Fulton Mackay's refusenik beachcomber – which Baxter is cute enough to make explicit.)

Such gently comedic comparisons lose their humour, however, as Baxter's film progresses and the intercut interviews with both partisan and independent experts and witnesses accumulate. Thus *You've Been Trumped* seems to change from a film about specifics to something wider: a film more about comparisons – initially between characters (Trump versus Forbes); then between interests (those of ecologically heedless fly-by-night rich golfers versus the local Balmedie folk); and even, finally, the relative power and morality of Big Business/International Capitalism relative to us, the poor little overwhelming individuals.

Knowingly, Trump has waged a campaign against Forbes that's as personal as it is clever, denigrating him as a "slum-dweller". Trump's power is personalised in his absence by his faithful employees, and Baxter shows well the purview of his uniformed private security staff and how the freedom of his hi-suited contractors to bulldoze the locals'



In the rough: Donald Trump

water supply or perimeter fences seem to make a mockery of the presumed independence of the local constabulary (who, at one point, arrest and lock up the squealing director for little apparent reason other than his annoyance factor).

In short, the very smallness, independence and even parochialism of Baxter's film seems suitable and never detracts from its considerable ability to inform and, surprisingly, move. He ends his laudable film with a bittersweet, knowing and sardonically funny short sequence – Baxter phoning Trump Towers from an isolated old red public phone box. It's another nod to *Local Hero* and a trumpet blast for the sheer indefatigability of 'the Little Man'. ◆◆ Wally Hammond

## CREDITS

**Produced by**  
 Richard Phinney  
**Written by**  
 Richard Phinney  
 Anthony Baxter  
**Cinematography**  
 Anthony Baxter  
**Editor**  
 William Rice  
**Music**  
 Jónsi  
 Sigur Rós  
**Original Music**  
 Jonny Pilcher  
**Dubbing Mixer**  
 Paul Langwade

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 Pictures Ltd

**Production  
 Companies**  
 A Montrose Pictures  
 presentation  
 A Bell Rock production  
 A film by Anthony  
 Baxter

**In Colour**  
 [1.85:1]

**Film Extracts**  
*Local Hero* (1983)

**Distributor**  
 Montrose Films

**9,049 ft +8 frames**

**SYNOPSIS** The dune system near the village of Balmedie, on the east coast of Aberdeenshire, is a rare wildlife habitat designated a Site of Special Scientific Interest. The American real-estate mogul Donald Trump has chosen this area as the location for a controversial \$1 billion development to include two golf courses, a \$400 million hotel and some 950 timeshare apartments.

The film follows the construction work, interviewing residents (notably the Forbes family, the Milnes and the Malones), politicians, academics, ecologists and oppositional 'Trip the Trump' supporters. These are intercut with film of press conferences, nature photography and local archive footage.





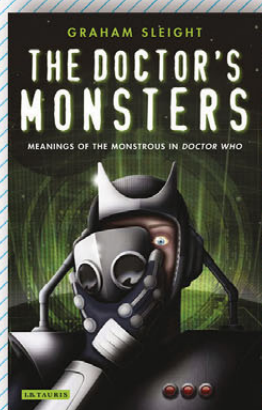
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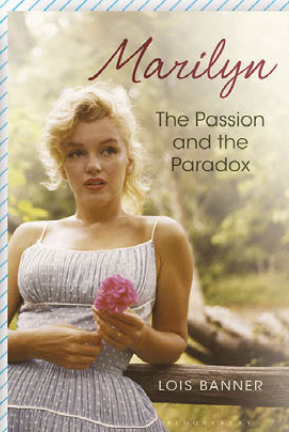


## **The Doctor's Monsters: Meanings of the Monstrous in Doctor Who**

By Graham Sleight, I.B. Tauris, paperback, 256pp, £12.99, ISBN 9781848851788

*Doctor Who* has been on global television screens for nearly 50 years, and many of its most memorable protagonists have been its monsters: the Daleks, Cybermen, Slitheen, Sontarans, Ood, Wirmn and others. Science-fiction critic Graham Sleight examines stories from throughout *Doctor Who*'s history to give this unique perspective on the series. Why are we so scared of monsters? How do they reflect the time and place the series is broadcast in? Along the way, the book provides a history – from an unusual angle – of how this most enduring of TV science-fiction series has created and recreated itself.

[www.ibtaurisc.com](http://www.ibtaurisc.com)



## **Marilyn: The Passion and the Paradox**

By Lois Banner, Bloomsbury, 528pp, illustrated, hardback, £20, ISBN 9781408814109

Published on the 50th anniversary of Marilyn Monroe's premature death, *Marilyn* is the story of a woman rooted in paradox. Marilyn was a powerful star and a childlike waif; a joyful, irreverent party girl with a deeply spiritual side; a superb friend and a narcissist; a dumb blonde and an intellectual. No previous biography has recognised – much less attempted to analyse – these battling aspects of her personality. Written by a founder of the field of women's history with access to never-before-seen files, records and pictures, *Marilyn* is a fascinating read.

[www.bloomsbury.com](http://www.bloomsbury.com)



## **Elizabeth Taylor**

By Susan Smith, Film Stars series, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 184pp, illustrated, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781844574865

Elizabeth Taylor's achievements as an actress have often been overshadowed by her beauty and tumultuous life off screen. To redress this imbalance, Susan Smith offers an illuminating study of Taylor's work in film, exploring her fascinating trajectory from child to adult star. Smith reveals the influence that Taylor's early work exerted over her later career and the ways in which her onscreen identity is profoundly rooted in her association with animals and nature. Smith carefully unpicks what made Taylor such a distinctive and dynamic screen performer – from the expressive use she made of her eyes to the dramatic significance of her voice – and considers the importance of the professional collaborations she forged during her career.

[www.palgrave.com/bfi](http://www.palgrave.com/bfi)

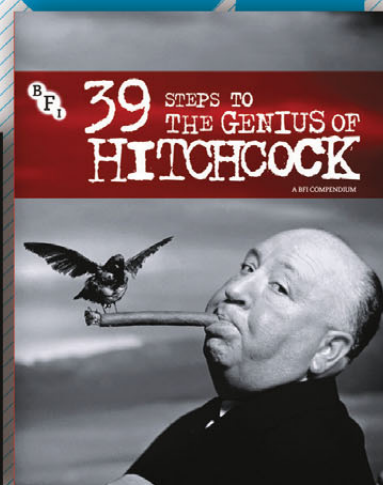


## **Nicole Kidman**

By Pam Cook, Film Stars series, BFI/Palgrave Macmillan, 160pp, illustrated, paperback, £12.99, ISBN 9781844574889

Pam Cook vividly brings to life Nicole Kidman's journey from Australian actress to global superstar, looking at her work in different contexts from film and television to fashion, commercials, philanthropy and the internet. In-depth analysis of key films such as *Dead Calm*, *To Die For*, *Eyes Wide Shut* and *The Hours* reveals Kidman's development of an 'actorly' performance style that enables her to combine stardom and celebrity with award-winning acting. Cook delves into the intricate media networks that circulate Kidman's image and story, assessing the contribution of her Australian identity to building her personal brand, her recent move into production and her cultural impact. This absorbing book unveils a star narrative as compelling as any that appears in her films.

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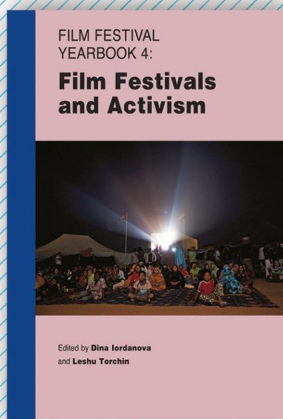
## **39 Steps to the Genius of Hitchcock**

A BFI Compendium edited by James Bell, 148pp, paperback, illustrated, £12 (plus p&p when bought online), ISBN 9781844575343

From his humble beginnings as a greengrocer's son in east London, Alfred Hitchcock rose to become the most famous and celebrated film director the world has ever known, his name a byword for cinematic suspense, excitement and innovation. Comprising 39 lavishly illustrated new essays by eminent critics, curators, historians and filmmakers, the first BFI Compendium offers a complete portrait of the man the world came to know as the 'Master of Suspense', and a fuller understanding of just what we mean when we describe something as 'Hitchcockian'. 39 Steps includes new writing from: Charles Barr, Patrick McGilligan, Laura Mulvey, Camille Paglia, David Thomson and Guillermo del Toro. Exclusively available from the BFI Filmstore, BFI Southbank, London (020 7815 1350) and online.

[www.bfi.org.uk/filmstore](http://www.bfi.org.uk/filmstore)



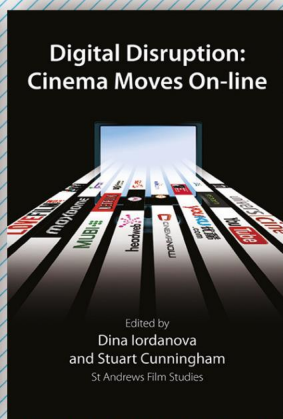


#### **Film Festival Yearbook 4: Film Festivals and Activism**

Edited by Dina Iordanova and Leshu Torchin, St Andrews Film Studies, 317pp, illustrated, paperback £19.99, ISBN 9780956373052/hardback £40, ISBN 9780956373069

Film festivals not only build markets and audiences, they also provide platforms for those advocating change, and in recent years have been playing an increasing role in social-justice movements and campaigns. Bringing together the perspectives of scholars, programmers, filmmakers and activists, *Film Festivals and Activism* provides essential insight into the nature, function and practice of activist film festivals. With interviews, conceptual overviews, case studies, histories, bibliographies and tables of festivals around the world, this volume offers an invaluable resource for scholars and practitioners alike.

[www.st-andrews.ac.uk/filmbooks](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/filmbooks)

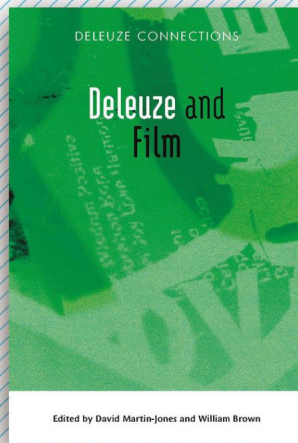


#### **Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-line**

Edited by Dina Iordanova and Stuart Cunningham, St Andrews Film Studies, 223pp, paperback £19.99, ISBN 9780956373076/hardback £50, ISBN 9780956373090

*Digital Disruption: Cinema Moves On-line* helps to make sense of what has happened in the short but turbulent history of online distribution. It provides a realistic assessment of the genuine and not-so-promising methods that have been tried to address the disruptions that moving from 'analogue dollars' to 'digital cents' has provoked in the film industry. Paying close attention to how the majors have dealt with the challenges – often unsuccessfully – it focuses as much attention on innovations and practices outside the mainstream. Throughout it is alive to – and showcases – important entrepreneurial innovations such as Mubi, Jaman, Withoutabox and IMDb.

[www.st-andrews.ac.uk/filmbooks](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/filmbooks)

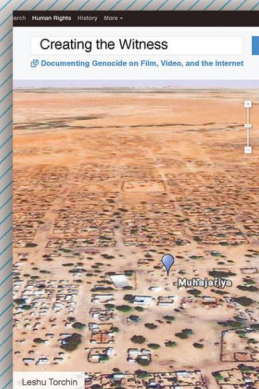


#### **Deleuze and Film**

Edited by David Martin-Jones and William Brown, Edinburgh University Press, 248pp, illustrated, hardback, £70, ISBN 9780748641215

A wide-ranging collection of essays on the film-philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, *Deleuze and Film* explores how different films from around the world 'think' about topics such as history, national identity, geopolitics, ethics, gender, genre, affect, religion, surveillance culture, digital aesthetics and the body. Mapping the global diversity of this cinematic thinking, this book greatly expands upon the range of films discussed in Deleuze's *Cinéma* books.

[www.euppublishing.com](http://www.euppublishing.com)

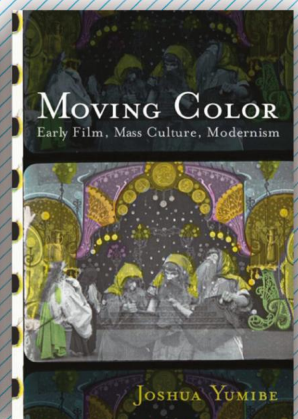


#### **Creating the Witness: Documenting Genocide on Film, Video, and the Internet**

By Leshu Torchin, University of Minnesota Press, illustrated, paperback £25, ISBN 9780816676231/hardback £75, ISBN 9780816676224

*Creating the Witness* examines the role of film and the internet in creating virtual witnesses to genocide over the past 100 years. Leshu Torchin's broad survey of media and the social practices around it investigates the development of popular understandings of genocide to achieve recognition and response, ultimately calling on viewers to act on behalf of human rights.

[www.upress.umn.edu](http://www.upress.umn.edu)



#### **Moving Color: Early Film, Mass Culture, Modernism**

By Joshua Yumibe, Rutgers University Press, 224pp, illustrated, paperback \$29.95, ISBN 9780813552972/hardback \$72, ISBN 9780813552965

*Moving Color* is the first book-length study of the beginnings of colour cinema. Looking backward, Joshua Yumibe traces the legacy of colour history from the beginning of the 19th century to the cinema of the early 20th century. Looking forward, he explores the implications of this genealogy on experimental and contemporary digital cinemas in which many colours have become, once again, vividly unhinged from photographic reality. Throughout this history, *Moving Color* revolves around questions pertaining to the sensuousness of colour: how colour moves us in the cinema – visually, emotionally and physically.

[rutgerspress.rutgers.edu](http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu)



# After the crash

'Margaret' came and went in cinemas without fanfare. Now it's back thanks to Twitter. Bravo, says **Michael Brooke**

## Margaret

Kenneth Lonergan; US 2008; Fox/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 179 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 anamorphic

Rewatching Kenneth Lonergan's debut 'You Can Count on Me' (2000) in the wake of his second feature 'Margaret', what's immediately striking is how similar they are. Both feature Mark Ruffalo, Matthew Broderick, Lonergan's wife J. Smith-Cameron and Lonergan himself; they each begin with a vehicle smash irrevocably altering the lives of those connected to the dead victims; they revolve around emotionally intense relationships between people with seemingly little in common besides strong blood ties; their protagonists are simultaneously headstrong and deeply immature; and many individual scenes are as beautifully crafted as anything in recent American cinema. In particular, Lonergan often cuts or fades out at the point when a notionally important conversation is about to start, the characters' interaction during the preamble having conveyed more than enough.

But while the earlier film is a perfectly constructed chamber piece that wears its 12 years well, Lonergan has given his cinematic 'difficult second album' much more to chew on, with often thrillingly ambitious but also undeniably mixed results. Its long gestation means that it's already a period piece: written circa 2003 and set in 2005, it was filmed in 2006 and belatedly released a few months ago – long after the deaths of two of its producers, Anthony Minghella and Sydney Pollack. A bald synopsis (a teenage girl struggles to cope with the aftermath of a fatal bus crash that she may have caused) doesn't sound anything like enough to fuel a three-hour film, but the screenplay's novelistic density and constant awareness of NYC life bustling around it (on several occasions, we eavesdrop on random strangers' conversations after Lonergan lowers the volume on notionally central ones) not only keep it consistently engrossing but also explain why Lonergan had such difficulties reducing it to a contractually mandated 150 minutes. This was the length at which it briefly opened in cinemas late last year, with minimal fanfare; afterwards it became the subject of a Twitter campaign for greater recognition, culminating in this video release of a significantly longer cut that bears a much stronger resemblance to Lonergan's 2005 shooting script.

While 'You Can Count on Me' revolved around mismatched siblings, the central relationship in 'Margaret' is that between



You can't count on me: Matt Damon and Anna Paquin in 'Margaret'

a mother and daughter. Joan (J. Smith-Cameron) is a stage actress more concerned about her upcoming lead performance in a possible Broadway transfer than about her children's emotional needs. While her youngest, Curtis, simply retreats to the piano whenever things get heated, 17-year-old Lisa (Anna Paquin) is a mass of hormones and neuroses: over the course of the film she encounters sudden, violent death at first hand, loses her virginity in notionally planned but less than fulfilling circumstances, frequently turns up the heat in emotively personalised classroom debates about various issues from 9/11 to Shakespeare, and has an affair with one of her teachers – and that's without taking into account a central narrative strand involving her impulsive plunge into complex legal matters as she seeks some kind of closure over the bus accident. If Lisa is often dislikeable and sometimes intensely so, that's hardly a criticism of Paquin's superb performance: she and Lonergan completely nail Lisa's self-absorbed solipsism, and even her most explosively immature moments ring uncomfortably true. However, one of her most contentious scenes plays differently in this longer cut. In the cinema version, there was no evidence that she'd actually had an abortion, making an out-of-the-blue claim to that effect seem possibly fantastical and, if so, shockingly vindictive. The longer version confirms in painful detail that she wasn't making it up.

But the film is often just as self-conscious as its protagonist. When Lisa

**If Lisa is sometimes intensely dislikeable, that's hardly a criticism of Paquin's superb performance**

takes a crucial mid-point decision that risks alienating the viewer, Lonergan cuts to a nudge-nudge classroom scene in which Matthew Broderick's English teacher emphasises that the opinions of Shakespeare's characters are not to be taken as confirmation of authorial approval. Later, in one of several cultural discussions with her Latino beau Ramon (Jean Reno), Joan complains about the way people approach things with inflated expectations – she's talking about the unexpected critical hit that she's starring in, but Lonergan can hardly have been unaware of how this point might apply to his own sophomore effort (this appears to be another formerly deleted scene, though in this case it might have been better left that way). The crash victim's best friend Emily (Jeannie Berlin) is infuriated with the way that Lisa sees everything in overblown and operatic terms: later, Lonergan ironically underscores Lisa's angry exit from a legal meeting with the doom-drenched D-minor chords of 'Don Giovanni' and has her ultimately reconciled with Joan during a stage performance of 'The Tales of Hoffmann'. Lonergan also stirs poetry into an already heady literary mix: the film's title comes from the "young child" to whom Gerard Manley Hopkins addressed his 'Spring and Fall'.

Given the film's many travails over the past decade, we shouldn't carp too much at this barebones DVD edition, whose only extra is hard-of-hearing subtitles: the picture and sound are fine. However, it's disappointing that UK customers only get a DVD of the extended cut: the US package also includes a Blu-ray of the theatrical edition. But if this release doesn't quite earn a full standing ovation, a modest 'bravi!' to all concerned seems fair: simply getting the film out in a version much closer to Lonergan's original intentions is a lot more than anyone dared hope even a few months ago.

## NEW RELEASES

### The All-American Boy

Charles Eastman; US 1970-73; Warner Archive/Region 0 DVD; 118 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1

**Film:** Charles Eastman (1929-2009) was a highly regarded screenwriter (*Little Fauss and Big Halsy*, *Second-Hand Hearts*), uncredited script doctor (*The Cincinnati Kid*, *This Property Is Condemned*, *Heaven Can Wait*) and occasional actor (Monte Hellman's *The Shooting* and *Ride in the Whirlwind*) whose sole directorial credit, *The All-American Boy*, was a notable failure. Filmed in 1970, it spent several years in the editing room (where it lost an hour of footage) before being briefly released in 1973. The published screenplay includes the missing scenes, while an unpublished memoir entitled *How to Make a Movie: The All-American Boy Blues* runs to around 1,000 pages and is among the most vivid accounts of the filmmaking process I've read.

*The All-American Boy* has finally made its DVD debut thanks to Warner's archive line of manufactured-on-demand discs. Seen in its original ratio (a previous VHS transfer was panned and scanned), Eastman's film stands revealed as a key work of the American new wave.

Jon Voight stars as Vic Bealer, an amateur boxer who returns home for his brother's funeral and demonstrates that whatever boxing skill he possesses is strictly secondary to his desire to evade the responsibilities of success and the ties of domesticity. Eastman told me he wasn't familiar with D.H. Lawrence's *Studies in Classic American Literature*, but *The All-American Boy* can be seen as a dramatisation of that book's central theme, Lawrence's insistence that "the most unfree souls go west, and shout of freedom... The shout is a rattling of chains, always was" being echoed in the climactic speech by Bob Hastings's trainer Ariel: "If you think you're free just because you're drifting around and nobody's got a hold on you, that's not free, Bealer, that's caught."

Bealer was partly based on Eastman's brother David, also the inspiration for the protagonist of *Five Easy Pieces* (1970), written by his sister Carole Eastman under the pseudonym Adrien Joyce (Ralph Waite's character in *Five Easy Pieces* was based on Charles). But *The All-American Boy* has far more in common with two other notable films from the 1969-71 period criticising dropout culture from an explicitly leftist perspective – Monte Hellman's *Two-Lane Blacktop* (Eastman would collaborate with Hellman on several unmade projects, notably adaptations of Ken Kesey's *Last Go Round* and Lionel White's *Obsession*) and Michelangelo Antonioni's *Zabriskie Point*. Antonioni's influence is especially clear, the shots of Voight lost in Eastman's widescreen landscapes evoking memories of *L'Avventura* and *La notte*. Whereas so much American cinema of the early 1970s has dated badly, this unjustly neglected gem looks fresher than ever. **Disc:** Warner's transfer is perfectly framed at 2.35:1. The print shows some traces of speckling but is otherwise in remarkably good condition. (BS)



## Bell, Book and Candle

Richard Quine; US 1958; *Twilight Time*/Region 1 Blu-ray; 103 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: isolated score track, two featurettes, original trailer, liner notes

**Film:** Reuniting James Stewart and Kim Novak in the year of *Vertigo*, Richard Quine's *Bell, Book and Candle* combined urban glamour and uncanny allure to make something like Hitchcock's masterpiece played for twinkling comedy.

Stewart's Shep Henderson is literally bewitched away from his painter fiancée (shades of Barbara Bel Geddes) by his barefoot bohemian downstairs neighbour, Novak's Gil Holroyd, who happens to be a practising sorceress. In addition to the vastly appealing stars – in this late romantic lead, Stewart looks somewhat long in the tooth in Technicolor – the cast includes TV star Ernie Kovacs as a tweedy toper, with Elsa Lanchester and Jack Lemmon as Gil's fellow practitioners of dark parlour tricks.

The backdrop to this romantic devilry is Manhattan, and *Bell, Book and Candle* conspires to invest contemporary New York with a capacity for magic. The film begins in the suspended, in-between space of Christmastime, under the gentle fall of soundstage snow, as on-the-prowl Gil lures Shep into her downtown hipster coven, the Zodiac Club – serpentine singer Philippe Clay is headlining. The great DP James Wong Howe gives the festive red-and-green palette a vaporous quality, a touch of the ethereal that leaps into the outright fantastic as, spending their first night together, Gil and Shep seem simply to *appear* atop the wedge-shaped Flatiron Building, overlooking a dawn-hazy skyline and the footpath tracteries in the white-powdered Madison Square Park. Giddy Gil tosses Shep's homburg off the side in impetuous elation, and the camera breaks away to track it 22 storeys down to the street. What goes up must come down – and so must Gil and Shep's romance come down to earth. The plot is the usual meet-cute/break-up/make-up, but here with a clever metaphorical twist – the renewal of affections after the revelation of Gil's ensorcelling trickery mirrors the way that any long-term couple must review themselves after the first endorphin rush of attraction has given way to more sober appraisal. Certainly, *Bell, Book and Candle* stands up to another look.

**Disc:** *Twilight Time*'s superior Blu-ray release recycles Novak-related featurettes from a 2010 Sony disc while adding superb liners by TT's in-house writer Julie Kirgo and an isolated score track highlighting composer George Duning's classy, cocktail-jazzy work. (NP)

## A Bullet for the General

Damiano Damiani; Italy 1966; *Blue Underground*/Region free Blu-ray; 115/118 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: Damiani interview, documentary

**Film:** Set during the 1910-20 Mexican Revolution and released during the mid-1960s heyday of the spaghetti western,



## Confidence Unfairly overshadowed by the success of István Szabó's other 1980s films, it is one of the director's strongest and most heartfelt works

Damiano Damiani's *A Bullet for the General* revolves around a practical allegiance struck between two mercenaries pursuing their own parallel agendas. One is Bill Tate (Lou Castel), a gringo wearing bank-teller pinstripes, south of the Rio Grande for reasons unknown. The other is 'El Chuchó' (Gian Maria Volonté), an unwashed *bandito* who steals rifles from the *federales* and sells them to revolutionary General Elías – profiteering that Chuchó keeps a secret from his warrior-priest brother El Santo (Klaus Kinski), whose true-believer fervency is the counterbalance to Tate's bookkeeper's philosophy.

In the formulation of screenwriter Franco Solinas, a frequent collaborator of leftist filmmakers Costa-Gavras and Gillo Pontecorvo, Chuchó is caught in a dialectic collision between Tate and El Santo, between an approach to politics that is opportunistic, professional, pragmatic, calculating and above all businesslike, and one that is emotional, intuitive and spiritual – a conflict resolved in the film's famous kicker: "Don't buy bread, buy dynamite!"

All of this might be stuffily doctrinaire were it not for *Bullet*'s richness of anecdotal incident, the lively dialogue between foreground and background detail sustained by Damiani, the sweaty and saddlesore historical immediacy, and the tender fascination between opposites that defines the semi-gay central relationship. Voluble, salt-of-the-earth Volonté is the identification

figure but he's granted a fascinating foil in Castel, the Swiss-Colombian actor best remembered from Bellocchio's *Fists in the Pocket* (1965) and Fassbinder's *Beware of a Holy Whore* (1971). Towheaded Castel's top-heavy lightbulb noggin gives his character something of the aspect of a sullen toddler; called *Niño* by his compatriots for his boyish looks, this enigmatic stranger reveals himself finally as the sartorial quintessence of imperial arrogance, wearing an immaculately white ice-cream-man suit while standing at the head of a Ciudad Juárez hotel's plushly carpeted stairwell. The American as beautiful, brilliant brat, Castel makes one of the most compelling villains of the spaghetti cycle.

**Disc:** *Blue Underground*'s natty new Blu-ray has the very marginally different American and international cuts of *Bullet* plus a Damiani interview and a two-hour doc on actor Volonté. (NP)

## Confidence

István Szabó; Hungary 1980; *Second Run*/Region 0 DVD; Certificate 15; 101 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9 anamorphic; Features: interview, booklet

**Film:** Unfairly overshadowed by the international success of István Szabó's other 1980s films, *Confidence* lacks a

barnstorming Klaus Maria Brandauer headline performance but more than compensates with its psychological acuity, in which respect it's one of the director's strongest and most heartfelt works. Much of it consists of muted conversations in dimly lit rooms, often between Katalin (Ildikó Bánsági) and János (Péter Andorai), two complete strangers forced to live as a married couple in order to conceal their links to Hungary's anti-Nazi resistance at a time (late 1944) of increased persecution. In an environment where anyone could be a police informer and where making even the most oblique reference to their past is strictly forbidden (indeed, where an accidental encounter with a former schoolfriend is fraught with peril), their notionally free existence becomes as stiflingly claustrophobic as a prison cell, their adulterous couplings betraying their desperate hunger for even the most superficial and temporary human warmth.

**Disc:** This intentionally grey and drab-looking film comes across well in the director-approved restoration. The only on-disc extra is a TCM-produced interview covering Szabó's life and career in general, but the booklet has a usefully context-setting essay on the film and its historical backdrop by Catherine Portuges. (MB)

## Correspondence(s)

Spain 2011; *Intermedio*/Region 0 DVD; 543 minutes total; Aspect Ratio 1.77:1 and 1.33:1; Features: 400-page booklet, dialogues between Albert Serra and Lisandro Alonso, Isaki Lacuesta and Naomi Kawase, and Jaime Rosales and Wang Bing

**Films:** There's a host of reasons for tracking down this excellent trilingual (Spanish/English/French) box-set of filmed letters between various international directors, but to begin with just a straightforward itemisation of what it contains should pique interest. There are five series of filmed epistolary exchanges: between Lisandro Alonso and Albert Serra; Jonas Mekas and José Luis Guerín; Wang Bing and Jaime Rosales; Isaki Lacuesta and Naomi Kawase; and Fernando Eimbecke and Kim So-Yong – plus filmed face-to-face conversations (in front of an audience) between each pair apart from the second and the last – particularly revealing in the case of Serra and Alonso (whose films plus those of Mekas/Guerín were shown at last year's BFI London Film Festival).

The idea of directors corresponding like this is such a simple yet resonant one it makes you wonder why it hasn't happened more frequently in the past, although one reason is obviously the availability of faster and cheaper means to do it now – which in no way implies any sense of slapdash low quality here. Instead there's more a willingness on the part of each participant to search for something essential in their work, to reflect tentatively, sometimes candidly, on their own filmmaking practice as well as that of their corresponding partners and the medium in general.

Revolutionary road:  
'A Bullet for the General'





## NEW RELEASES

← In fact, even before you open the box, just a vague notion of what it contains will inevitably prompt questions and speculations – how to negotiate a correspondence that is simultaneously both personal and intended for an audience? Were the participants paired up by virtue of already perceived correspondences in their respective filmographies, whatever form those might take, or was there some other governing precept that led to the search for affinities? What might you want to try to elicit from the other person in such an exchange, as well as reveal and/or conceal about yourself, and how to go about that? The different responses and permutations across the five pairs – the ways in which a conversation builds and each participant reflects and refracts the other's work – are endlessly fascinating, and occasionally instructive. It would never have occurred to me, for example, that there was much in the way of common aesthetic ground between Jaime Rosales and Wang Bing, but I now stand corrected. The latter's study of a remote, impoverished community in rural China, in particular the heartrending plight of one family's children, is among the most memorable items in the whole set. Other highlights include Alonso and Serra's neat sidestepping of the whole notion

of a back-and-forth dialogue, hinting at future lines of enquiry in their own practices (particularly novel and exciting in the case of Alonso). Most moving of all are the exchanges between Guérin and Mekas – something to do with the humility and tenderness with which the brilliant younger man acknowledges Mekas's influence and gifts him some astonishing images and meditations. It's worth getting hold of this set just for that.

**Discs:** In addition to the films the set includes a trilingual 400-page booklet which explains the project's inception (initiated by and ultimately exhibited in Barcelona's Contemporary Art Centre but supported by several other institutions globally) and its rationale – essentially building on the widely admired touchstone exchange of filmed letters between Abbas Kiarostami and Victor Erice in 2005-07, which isn't included here but will apparently surface on another DVD in the not-too-distant future. It should be said as well that the essays in the booklet are very good, written by a formidable pantheon of critics and curators such as Nicole Brenez, Alain Bergala, Jordi Ballo and Olivier Père, opening up and contextualising the whole notion of filmed letters in thoughtful, insightful ways. (KC)



BFI NATIONAL ARCHIVE/SPECIAL COLLECTIONS (C)

Bedtime story: Doris Day in 'Pillow Talk'

### Films starring Doris Day

#### Pillow Talk

Michael Gordon; US 1959; Universal Pictures UK/Region 0 Limited Edition Digibook Blu-ray; Certificate PG; 103 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1; Features: 'Back in Bed with Pillow Talk', 'Chemistry 101: The Film Duo of Doris Day and Rock Hudson', feature commentary, trailer, booklet, three promotional documentaries on '100 Years of Universal' **Caprice**

Frank Tashlin; US 1967; Second Sight/Region 2 DVD; Certificate U; 94 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1

**Films:** A museum piece that's fresh as a daisy, textbook romantic comedy *Pillow Talk* remains remake-proof because its meet-cute involves a telephone party line – understandable for 1942 when the script was written but even by 1959 decidedly old-hat. Not that this spoils the fun. When interior designer Jan (Doris Day) reports womanising songwriter Brad (Rock Hudson in his first comedy) for hogging their party line, Brad vengefully poses as Rex Stetson, a gentlemanly Texan whom Jan soon falls for. The Oscar-winning screenplay bristles with wit (such as Tony Randall's worrying over his ever-steady \$8 million fortune: "I just can't seem to get ahead") and nods to changing gender roles, with Hudson mistaken for the world's first pregnant man and a sequence in which, with staggering irony, he encourages Day's suspicions that he's secretly gay.

It seems quaint, with its fashionable apartments, rear-projection car trips and Thelma Ritter's disbelief that Day could possibly be happy single. Yet, teetering on the brink of the 1960s, the film betrays a guarded raciness. In an era when not even married couples could be shown in bed together, *Pillow Talk*'s celebrated split-screen phone conversations were risqué, pictorially uniting the stars in beds or baths while keeping them safely apart. Like a celluloid Trojan horse, the technique wheels in modern ways while ostensibly upholding tradition.

Day (Oscar-nominated) is note-perfect; sarcastic, tender-hearted, sensible and sexy. ("So that's the other end of your party line," muses Hudson, admiring her backside as she rhumbas.)

If you want to see Day ski off a mountain dressed in garish yellow a decade before Roger Moore did, then *Caprice* is your film. A daft spy comedy involving Interpol and a top-secret hairspray, Fox's final CinemaScope release was scorned by Day (working under duress) and co-star Richard Harris. Yet it boasts the trademark cartoonish mischief of director Frank Tashlin, who subjects industrial spy Day to numerous slapstick indignities and concocts mayhem with microphones hidden in food (a joke previously seen in his and Day's *The Glass Bottom Boat*, but better exploited here).

*Caprice* echoes Stanley Donen's *Charade* (1963), with a similar title and locales, jokey shower scenes, a macguffin in mundane disguise and even an introductory scene involving a gunshot by a piste. But unlike Donen's own *Charade* clone *Arabesque* (1966), *Caprice* is tonally capricious, eventually sending Day into a cinema that's showing *Caprice* starring Doris Day and Richard Harris, where she watches the start of the film she's in. It's much more Gondry than Smiley.

**Discs:** The *Pillow Talk* Blu-ray is sharp and colourful, though loses a sliver on the right. Optical shots (split screens and dissolves) have unavoidable graininess. The extras include a fair documentary and an exceptionally informative commentary. The *Caprice* DVD is visually splendid but has no extras (not even subtitles). (PF)

### The Devil's Needle & Other Tales of Vice and Redemption

**The Devil's Needle/The Inside of the White Slave Traffic/Children of Eve** Chester Withey/Frank Beal/John H. Collins/US 1916/13/15; Kino Classics/Region 1 Blu-ray and NTSC DVD; 66/28/73 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: notes



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by historian Richard Koszarski, outtake footage, 'raw' unpreserved footage

**Films:** Paradigmatic examples of early cinema as fascinating cultural history, these three silent Wilson-era morality tales are the cave paintings of mainstream 'socially conscious' melodrama, fuelled narratively by the tragedy of innocence lost. (Their emotional thrust would not be lost on David Lynch as it surely would be on Luis Buñuel.) Formally, all three films utilise the early-Griffith square-on compositions, juiced up by frequent (and sometimes exciting) intercutting and very occasional irised close-ups. Surprisingly, there are fewer intertitles than you would suppose; the stories are often told by way of knowing glances and gestures – which, given the incendiary nature of the subject-matter, makes perfect sense.

Chester Withney's *The Devil's Needle* is a rather unpredictable and class-fraught drama about the lures of morphine, with a young Norma Talmadge vamping it up as a junkie artist's model turning the maddened painter she loves into a dope fiend and then regretting it. The two-reel fragment of the four-reel *The Inside of the White Slave Traffic* is, as its title suggests, methodical about outlining the seemingly farcical 'structure' of the American pimp-and-prostitute underworld (complete with a slang index and bona fides supplied by a then legit sociologist), and the Edison-produced *Children of Eve* paints the broadest social canvas, taking on child labour and poverty and climaxing with a spectacular factory fire, a building collapse and a line of child corpses deliberately echoing the 1911 Triangle Shirtwaist Factory tragedy.

Then as now, attempting to wrestle morally with real social ills was a tightrope walk. We may get the sense that these films were exploring taboo waters, but at this remove we are perhaps naive about early-20th-century audiences: for the *Variety* reviewer of *The Devil's Needle*, the movie hardly mustered "box-office excitement" and "never even got beyond a Methodist balance". The target demographic here was middle-class audiences eager to be both titillated and educated about social travails outside their ken – a dynamic that was fed more eagerly and dangerously by Dwain Esper and 'the 40 Thieves' a few decades hence. But here is cinema in its toddlerhood attempting to convert authentic suffering into entertaining media discourse, creating living history in the bargain.

**Discs:** Though restored and preserved by the Library of Congress, these films have still incurred a fair amount of abuse and decay, so that *The Devil's Needle* shudders and pulses throughout with liquid shadows until the final scenes, which are subsumed in a frenzy of Brakhagian decay. The notes by film historian Richard Koszarski are concise and helpful, but check out the footage extras: actual outtakes from the factory fire sequence in *Children of Eve* (mostly of the firemen and escapees) and the entirety of *White Slave Traffic's* existing footage, unrestored and unbuttressed by the

# Space invaders

*A generation-gap sci-fi from genre maestro Jack Arnold delivers a spooky sense of wonder, says Tim Lucas*

## The Space Children

Jack Arnold; US 1958; Olive Films/Region A Blu-ray and Region 1 DVD; Aspect Ratio 1.78:1

As the mastermind behind half a dozen classic films produced by the visionary William Alland at Universal-International, ranging from 'It Came from Outer Space' to 'The Creature from the Black Lagoon', director Jack Arnold tempts description as the baseline of all 1950s science-fiction cinema. Anyone else working in the same field at the same time must be measured against him – as better (Robert Wise, 'The Day the Earth Stood Still'), worse (Virgil Vogel, 'The Mole People') or cut from very similar cloth (Joseph Newman, 'This Island Earth'). Some have claimed that Alland bore more responsibility for the quality of Arnold's best films than is generally accepted, but Arnold's confidence and unmistakable tone are equally apparent in films such as 'High School Confidential!' and particularly the cult western 'No Name on the Bullet', which Alland didn't produce, and also in his few splendidly characteristic episodes of the 1955 US teleseries 'Science Fiction Theatre'.

What distinguishes Arnold's work from that of his peers is his ability to invest pulp science-fiction material with an aura of speculation, perfectly pitched between not too wholesome and not too dark. His films posit the viewer on the cusp of discovery, between the known and the unknown, and they are often about overcoming the fears and dangers inherent in claiming new knowledge.

For reasons we can only guess at, Arnold lost his voice as a filmmaker after leaving Universal-International for a taste of directing A-pictures with the US/UK co-production 'The Mouse That Roared' (1959). It was a popular success, one that helped give fledgling producer Walter Shenson the grounding he would need to produce the Beatles films a few years further on, but by that time Arnold would be working steadily in series television (including 26 episodes of 'Gilligan's Island'), with the occasional Bob Hope feature tossed in as a paid vacation.

Though some of Arnold's later features (such as the 1969 underwater comedy 'Hello Down There') have science-fiction elements, 'The Space Children' – produced by Alland on a slashed budget for Paramount – represents Arnold's conclusive science-fiction statement. ('Monster on the Campus', his final Universal-International project, was held up by reshoots involving a change in the monster's makeup and released some months later.) Shot at compact B-picture



Moppet movie: 'The Space Children'

## An alien brainblob peaceably unifies the children with a hive mentality

length, the story – concocted by Tom Filer (who previously wrote the thematically similar 'Beast with a Million Eyes') and Bernard C. Schoenfeld (writer of Robert Siodmak's classic noir 'Phantom Lady') – is a plea against the non-militarisation of space. This places it somewhat in the mould of 'The Day the Earth Stood Still' but it aims for a more volatile target by assembling a group of young actors on its frontlines to embody Earth's fresh-faced hopes for tomorrow. These include such then-familiar faces as Michel Ray (the Ida Lupino-eyed child star of 'The Brave One'), Sandy Descher (the little girl who screamed "THEM!"), Johnny Crawford (TV's 'The Rifleman') and the lesser-known Johnny Washbrook (you'd go to him if you were casting Marshall Thompson, the star of many such films, as a 14-year-old). They play the children of various technicians whose families have relocated to a coastal trailer park while working on Project Eagle Point, a top-secret undertaking to launch the world's first defensive missile, known as the Thunderer, into orbit.

An apocalyptic pall is present in the setting before anything really happens, articulated by one of the mothers, Mrs Brewster (Peggy Webber), who notes of the somewhat lunar landscape that "the ocean and the rocks make me feel so unimportant", while the coastline evokes being "so close to the end of the world". This becomes a more real possibility when the children, while beachcombing, witness a glowing orb gliding to earth from a beacon in the sky; it turns out to be a vaguely Lovecraftian alien brainblob that peaceably unifies them with a hive

mentality to sabotage the rocket for the sake of space and Earth itself.

Writing about 'The Space Children' in his seminal 1970 book 'Science Fiction in the Cinema', critic John Baxter observed that the film, "Ostensibly made for children... is so bleakly unsympathetic in its study of adults that it must have widened inestimably the gulf between the generations." The parents and officials are portrayed as insensitive and selfish, duller and more neurotic than their receptive offspring, while the children's centrality to the drama is simply and impressively stated by residing the film's real casting strengths with them rather than their elders. One short-lived exception is Russell Johnson, cast against type as a self-loathing, out-of-work technician retreating into alcohol and domestic tyranny. When his accidental death is followed by the refusal of his wife and son to cry, we see the genre venturing, for the first time, into shadings of darker human experience that even Arnold's earlier work wasn't ready to admit. The film wasn't well received at the time of its release, but in retrospect it announces the advent of generational conflict in science-fiction cinema in a manner that presages Wolf Rilla's 'Village of the Damned', Joseph Losey's 'The Damned', Barry Shear's 'Wild in the Streets' and, on the level of coastal setting and precarious tone, Joe Dante's 'Matinee' of decades later.

Olive Films' unspecific 'widescreen' presentation inexplicably crops the original 1.85:1 ratio to 1.78:1, making some compositions appear tightly boxed, but the beauty of Ernest Laszlo's cinematography remains appropriately stellar and eerie. Equally impressive is the score by (Nathan) Van Cleave, whose characteristic moodiness becomes especially thrilling when reorchestrated for space. Though the film is presented in two-channel mono, surround playback is warmly recommended for those viewers desirous of a spooky sense of wonder.



## NEW RELEASES

new story-bridge title cards. All told, a formidable bit of time travel. (MA)

**Force of Evil**

Abraham Polonsky; US 1948; Olive Films/Region 1 NTSC DVD and Blu-ray; 78 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.37:1; Features: introduction by Martin Scorsese

**Film:** One of *film noir's* greatest and most morally awake entries, Polonsky's seething masterpiece has always stood out in an evergreen genre landscape that resonates, then and now, more as a zeitgeist cataract than by way of individual achievements. (We'll often sit down to a grade-B Elizabeth Scott or Edmond O'Brien film without hopes for greatness, but with only the desire to taste another thin slice of American cinema's richest genre pie.) *Noir's* iconographic identity has been its own reward in most instances, but Polonsky's film has a personality, a distinctive confluence of soul-rot and poetic eloquence, that's utterly unique.

John Garfield, working independently again after *Body and Soul*, his hit with Polonsky from the year before, stars as the lawyer of a numbers-racket combo whose already poisoned sense of purpose combusts when a rigged scheme threatens to destroy his elder brother's numbers 'bank'. As the overweight, bitter, cardiac-challenged brother, Thomas Gomez delivers the performance of his career, boiling over with spite and regret, and the dialogue he's given pulses with intelligent anger. (As *The New York Times's* Bosley Crowther put it then, in a rare moment of acuity, the movie "catches in eloquent tatters of on-the-wing dialogue moving intimations of the pathos of hopeful lives gone wrong.") "I'm a man with heart trouble," Gomez's sour nowhere man tells his mob-terrified bookkeeper. "I die almost every day myself. That's the way I live. Silly habit."

*Force of Evil* is also unusual in that it attends carefully to the mechanics of illegal business, every step of the way; certainly it shares with films like *Gilda* (1946) the pungent complementary reflections of post-war organised crime and legit business, but it also breaks down the numbers racket into such logical layers that it begins to resemble any other capitalist enterprise. Still, Polonsky also proves himself a heartstopper on a par with Anthony Mann in the experience of *noir* violence, in an explosive basement-restaurant skirmish that climaxes with a bullet to the face and a triangulated shootout in a pitch-dark office that rivals the best moments of Lang.

At the centre of all this despair and Cain-Abel angst stands Garfield, mannered as always but powerful as the all-but-loathsome schemer convinced that everyone has a price as he does (secretly reading the fact that perhaps they don't) and hoping that saving his brother from doom will redeem him.

**Disc:** Typically suitable Olive transfer from an archive print, with an introduction by Martin Scorsese (recorded in 1995 for the VHS edition),

speaking about the film's influence on his own New York mobster movies, from *Mean Streets* to *GoodFellas*. (MA)

**The House by the Cemetery**

Lucio Fulci; Italy 1981; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 86 minutes; Aspect Ratio 2.35:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: two commentaries (Catriona MacColl, Silvia Collatina), multiple interviews (MacColl, Giovanni Frezza, Giannetto De Rossi, Sergio Stivaletti), documentary ('Ladies of Italian Horror'), cast reunion Q&A, Italian exploitation trailer compilation, booklet

**Film:** After three out-and-out zombie films (*Zombie Flesh Eaters*, *City of the Living Dead* and *The Beyond*), Italian goremeister Lucio Fulci tried a slightly (though not very) different tack in this shameless mash-up of Henry James (quoted directly) and Mary Shelley.

A family moves into the house of the title, only to discover that it was once owned by the controversial surgeon Dr Jacob Freudstein (sic) and that, despite being born in the early 19th century, he's still very much around. As ever with Fulci, the frequently nonsensical plot plays second fiddle to a succession of protracted and ultra-gory horror set pieces (unexpurgated here), though the lower-key encounters between a little boy and his ghostly counterpart are often effectively creepy – at least when the boy keeps his mouth shut: in a video introduction actor Giovanni Frezza tacitly apologises for the fingernails-on-blackboard voice that he's been saddled with in the English dub.

**Disc:** One of Arrow's more impressive Italian-sourced Blu-rays, this looks simultaneously pristine and (intentionally) grubby, the patina of grain adding a tactile quality missing from earlier DVD releases. English and Italian soundtracks are

included, both obviously post-synched. There may be a kitchen sink lurking among the extras: certainly, every other base has been amply covered in a plethora of commentaries and often lengthy interviews. (MB)

**King of New York**

Abel Ferrara; US 1990; Arrow/Region B Blu-ray and Region 2 DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 103 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1 (DVD anamorphic); Features: two commentaries (Abel Ferrara, assorted crew), interviews (Ferrara, Augusto Caminito), documentaries, trailers, booklet

**Film:** Abel Ferrara's best film since his *Ms. 45* breakthrough ten years earlier stands up well two decades on – indeed, its knockout cast looks all the more impressive given its comparatively meagre budget, since Wesley Snipes, Laurence Fishburne and Steve Buscemi came considerably cheaper back then. But it's Christopher Walken's film first and foremost: he rarely participates in the many well-staged action scenes but he doesn't need to, since his charismatic rapport with his henchmen has them eating out of his hand as soon as he's released from prison and sets about rebuilding his empire. Someone like John Sayles (whose *City of Hope* came out shortly afterwards) would undoubtedly have upped the political content, but the film's central proposal of a gangland equivalent of the late Robin Cook's 'ethical foreign policy' comes across loud and clear.

**Discs:** The high-definition transfer is visually excellent, but the surround-sound remix is curiously muted: the original stereo soundtrack (thankfully also included) is far punchier.

A truckload of extras, most recycled from previous DVD releases, includes several context-setting contributions from *S&S's* Brad Stevens, though the standouts are Ferrara's own delirious

commentary (which has to be heard to be believed) and Rafi Pitts's shambling, discursive but oddly likeable 80-minute documentary portrait. (MB)

**Lidice**

Petr Nikolaev; Czech Republic 2011; Magic Box/Region B and C Blu-ray (DVD also available); 126 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.85:1; Features: production featurette, interviews, music videos, trailer, soundtrack CD

**Film:** Although there have been several films about the 1942 assassination of Nazi Reichsprotektor Reinhard Heydrich (Fritz Lang's *Hangmen Also Die!*, Douglas Sirk's *Hitler's Madman*, Jiri Sequens's *Atentát*, Lewis Gilbert's *Operation Daybreak*), the main celluloid memorial to the Czech village of Lidice, obliterated by the Nazis in reprisal, has until now been Humphrey Jennings's recently revived *The Silent Village* (1943), whose setting was transposed to Wales. Perhaps unsurprisingly, this belated domestic equivalent is very similar in tone and content to Andrzej Wajda's *Katyn* (2007), in that it's sombre, respectful, often intensely moving but also somewhat old-fashioned. However, it's noticeably more focused than Wajda's picture, thanks to the neat dramatic device of a man imprisoned for manslaughter at the start of the film and released near the end to find himself Lidice's only adult male survivor and consequently an embarrassment to the post-1945 Czech authorities who are trying to move on. The treatment of the massacre judiciously balances parallel needs to convey the horror without wallowing in it: the way the Nazis treat Lidice's livestock with more respect than its human population speaks volumes in itself.

**Disc:** As one would expect with a recent digitally shot film, the Blu-ray looks and sounds superb. However, while the English subtitles are clear, idiomatic and typo-free, they only accompany the main feature, though the musical extras (including a soundtrack CD) don't need translation. (MB)

**Nightbirds**

Andy Milligan 1970; BFI Flipside/Region A/1 Blu-ray and DVD Dual Format; Certificate 18; 77 + 82 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: audio commentary, 'The Body Beneath', original trailers, booklet with contributions by Nicolas Winding Refn, Tim Lucas, Stephen Thrower and Jimmy McDonough

**Film:** If American grindhouse auteur Andy Milligan is known at all it's for a run of talky, misanthropic, grimy-looking horror movies (his 1970 feature, the distinctively Milliganesque *The Body Beneath* – a peculiar, off-kilter stab at a vampire film shot in the environs of Highgate Cemetery and Hampstead Heath – is included as an extra on this release). Milligan was a man of the (fringe) theatre, whose preferred genre might have been Warhol/Morrissey-esque lowlife melodrama, albeit scripted like a coffee-house play rather than made up by the actors – but the only route



**Force of Evil** One of film noir's greatest and most morally awake entries... A confluence of soul-rot and poetic eloquence that's utterly unique



he found to distribution was to ladle in sex and horror and subsume art to exploitation. In 1968, Milligan relocated for a spell from Staten Island to London, and made five minimally budgeted pictures with an assortment of jobbing actors, Soho pick-ups and passers-by.

*Nightbirds*, originally entitled *Pigeons*, was an odd choice to kick off an exploitation package deal, at once ambitious and threadbare and, glimpses of nudity and frank talk notwithstanding, unsaleable as tat. Dink (Berwick Kaler), on the streets after falling out with a maniac mother (a recurring Milligan theme), is picked up by Dee (Julie Shaw), a well-spoken blonde who turns out to be literally and figuratively rotten inside. Estranged from posh parents she says are dead, Dee likens herself to a vampire and deliberately infects partners with syphilis. She treats Dink like the broken-legged pigeon that crashes against their roof – with a spell of smothering love, a deft snipping of other social ties he might have had, and a murderous neck-twist.

Milligan himself seemed to regret that this particular film narrowed his misanthropy into misogyny – though as with the works of writers such as Somerset Maugham and Terence Rattigan, who in no other way can be compared with Andy Milligan, it may be that a gay experience has been channelled into a straight story. Awkwardly played, shot through with *longueurs*, full of moments of obvious private significance and entirely filmed in daylight to belie the title, *Nightbirds* is dissociative viewing by anyone's standards but still bizarrely compelling.

**Discs:** The usual meticulous Flipside booklet includes input from Nicolas Winding Refn (who godfathered the release), Jimmy McDonough, Stephen Thrower and Tim Lucas, providing a wealth of contextualising materials. The transfers on this Blu-ray/DVD combo do what they can with the source elements, and options of 'fully mixed' and 'dialogue-only' audio tracks are offered for both films. Also included are trailers (the *Nightbirds* spot includes every instance of nudity and swearing from the film) and a commentary track with Thrower interviewing star Berwick Kaler, who is as puzzled as everyone else by a career trajectory that led from being crucified by a vampire vicar in *The Body Beneath* to later stage stardom as a pantomime dame. (KN)

### The Rafi Pitts Collection

**Sanam/It's Winter/The Hunter**

Iran 2000/Iran & France 2006/Iran & Germany 2010; Artificial Eye/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 15; 88/86/90 minutes; Aspect Ratio 16:9; Features: interviews with Rafi Pitts, director's biography, trailer

**Films:** Too crude probably, to suggest that this excellent collection shows the Anglo-Iranian Rafi Pitts working out his aesthetic relationship to Iranian film, but it's a useful illustration of the development and considerable strengths of his insider-outsider's eye. *Sanam*, his 2000 feature about a boy and his mother and their struggles in a rural



## The Red House A sort of rural noir, it combines smothering foreboding with fresh outdoor photography and a sense of quotidian existence in remote places

community after the father is killed for horse thieving, uses the conventional Iranian neorealist template to examine the cultural pressures on widows and orphans. But it is already marked out by Pitts's distinctive use of landscape – such as the gorgeous and expressive opening long-shot in which tiny, half-observed figures on a hillside play out a vital scene replete with ambiguities.

This characteristic combination of visual eloquence and implied social criticism is seen at its most effective in *It's Winter*, a beautiful, austere and circular tragedy in which a luckless drifter courts an abandoned wife. Here Pitts makes explicit and fruitful connections between Iranian cinema and poetry. *It's Winter* not only takes a hauntingly repetitive narrative form but winds an exquisite sung version of Mehdi Akhavan Sales's famous poem on winter (and political repression) around

**Goodfella: 'King of New York'**



a narrative that's fired by the contrast between non-actor Ali Nicsolat's sly, smitten performance and the stoic soulfulness of film star Mitra Hadjar.

The theme of oppression carries through into *The Hunter*, erupting into a taciturn but powerful revenge tale about a security guard seeking payback after his wife and daughter are killed in crossfire in the 2009 pre-election riots. This film is more multilayered than its predecessors, its adroit mixing of overt political themes through Pitts's established neorealism – plus a startling genre switch into full-throttle thriller, complete with screeching, fog-wreathed car chase – making it his most accomplished work to date. Shot through with the institutional menace of the US 1970s paranoia thriller, and with a nod to the western in its final act, it shows Pitts infusing one cinema culture with another in a fashion at once restrained and exhilarating.

**Discs:** The transfers and sound quality are uniformly good, and *It's Winter* and *The Hunter* show off DP Mohammad Davudi's meticulous compositions and moody palettes very well. Pitts talks about his work with delicacy, believing that "you have to let reality breathe – and have not too narrow an idea when you're shooting". He is fascinating on the unique problems of Iranian production – such as being forced to take the lead himself in *The Hunter* when he wanted to replace his leading man, because of the tortuous official approval process for shooting permits. (KS)

### The Red House

Delmer Daves; US 1947; HD Cinema Classics/Region A/1 Blu-ray and DVD Dual Format; 100 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: audio commentary

**Film:** There is an insinuating crawliness to *The Red House* which, once experienced, never quite leaves you.

I last encountered Delmer Daves's film a decade or more back in a degraded VHS copy – *The Red House* has long been the victim of Public Domain neglect – and can still remember the fell wind blowing through the trees, the air of sexual unease, the sense of secrets hiding in bright, open spaces, and the unctuous presence of Rory Calhoun, a low-rent, rockabilly Gable.

Daves is most widely remembered for his 'psychological' westerns of the 1950s, including *Jubal* and *3:10 to Yuma*, but 1947's *The Red House* is an earlier testament to his attempt to express troubled mindsets through cinematographic means. On a remote farm in the Southern woods, patriarch Pete Morgan (Edward G. Robinson) lives with his spinster sister (Judith Anderson) and his adopted teenage charge Meg (Allene Roberts). All is peaceful, until one of Meg's classmates, Nath (Lon McCallister), is hired as a hand and begins to violate Pete's carefully laid-out taboos. Foremost of these is a prohibition against entering Oxhead Woods, whose overgrowth hides Pete's past like thickets of the subconscious; to venture within whips up vengeful gales, Miklós Rózsa's tumultuous score (with theremin!) and the rage of the seemingly benevolent farmer.

A sort of rural noir, *The Red House* combines smothering foreboding – and Robinson's anguished gargoyle mask – with fresh outdoor photography and a keen sense of quotidian existence in remote places, where life is measured in terms of daylight and distance. Daves is particularly attentive to both quantities, getting tremendous emotional effect from a love triangle at a swimming hole through the sparest of dialogue and cutting, his film a textbook study in cleanly delineated interrelationships and finding eloquent landscape analogues for a variety of interior states.

**Disc:** After years of transfers as rank and jungle as Oxhead Woods, HD Cinema Classics has hacked away the bracken and discovered a rather beautiful movie. With audio commentary by noir aficionado William Hare. (NP)

### Three Melodramas by Yasujiro Ozu

**Woman of Tokyo/Early Spring/Tokyo Twilight**

Japan 1933/56/57; BFI/Region 2 DVD; 45/139/135 minutes; Aspect Ratio 1.33:1; Features: optional score by Ed Hughes, illustrated booklet

**Films:** The title of this two-disc set almost warrants a double-take. Melodrama? From the master of domestic quietude and emotional understatement? Admittedly there's a touch of creative marketing in packaging some lesser-known Ozu titles in this way, but the subject-matter at least fits the bill. Parental abandonment, marital infidelity, unwanted pregnancy and even tougher plot developments mark these storylines, even if Ozu's



## NEW RELEASES

← treatment of them displays a not unexpected tact and discretion – during one illicit kiss, he cuts to a whirring electric fan in the corner, which turns away... as if in embarrassment.

The silent featurette *Woman of Tokyo* dates from 1933, knocked out in a nine-day window of opportunity, and its saga of a university student shocked by the news that his dutiful sister may be moonlighting as a bar hostess is a fascinating if somewhat underdeveloped remnant from the formative decade when Ozu tried out various genres for size. Much more substantial are the two fairly expansive dramas he made in the wake of *Tokyo Story*, seemingly in response to requests from the studio that he deliver something a bit more contemporary than usual. His response is utterly intriguing, the bleakness of the material in both *Early Spring* (there's a marriage on the rocks but basically everyone's miserable) and *Tokyo Twilight* (an errant mother's fateful decision resonates through the generations) shaping a portrayal of individuals emotionally imprisoned rather than sustained by the interweave of work and family ties. The result is a sense of metropolitan ennui that feels more modern than much of the Ozu oeuvre.

Of course, he resists the sort of demonstrative excesses one might expect of the 'melodrama' tag, yet the archetypal Japanese social coherence is tested almost to breaking point here (in *Tokyo Twilight*, it's shocking to hear actress Hara Setsuko, so often the exemplar of goodness in Ozu's films, raise her voice with piercing intensity during one turbulent exchange). Indeed, the rising tensions actually serve to point up the idiosyncrasies of the films' formal construction – who else would play painful scenes to a background of rinky-dink fairground music? Or determinedly keep a story's pivotal moments off screen?

Ozu would change course again as he entered the colour phase in his filmography, but it's valuable to be reminded of this dark and brooding tributary in his distinguished career.

**Discs:** The two later films get clean transfers improving on previous Tartan and Carlotta offerings, and are probably as good as these titles are going to look in standard def. Some soundtrack wear and tear on *Tokyo Twilight*, however, and the print of *Woman of Tokyo* occasionally wavers (though it's mostly in surprisingly good nick). Ed Hughes's attuned cello-plus-percussion score is a bonus here, and the notes by Tony Rayns and Nick Wrigley among others are well up to par. (T)

**This month's releases reviewed by Sergio Angelini, Michael Atkinson, Michael Brooke, Kieron Corless, Patrick Fahy, Trevor Johnston, Kim Newman, Nick Pinkerton, Kate Stables and Brad Stevens**

## TELEVISION

## Earth 2

Amblin TV/Universal/NBC; US/1994-95; Mediumrare/Region 2 DVD; 1,031 minutes; Certificate PG; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: deleted scenes, outtakes

**Programme:** This early excursion into TV by Steven Spielberg's Amblin Entertainment (recently revamped, with added dinosaurs, as *Terra Nova*) transplants the taming of the American frontier to a sci-fi setting.

Two hundred years in the future, Earth has become uninhabitable and people now live on orbiting space stations – but children are being born with a fatal syndrome that can only be cured by moving to an actual planet. Going against the powerful Council, billionaire Devon Adair sets sail for a new home planet to save her ailing young son Ulysses (horribly nicknamed 'Uly'). Two decades later Devon and her fellow colonists awake from cryogenic sleep to find their ship sabotaged and crashlanding on alien planet G889.

The survivors, dramatically speaking, have less to worry about from their new surroundings than they do from each other – and that doesn't just mean the double agent working for the Council. This show's real hurdles come in the shape of crass product placement (200 years hence, homesteading Americans apparently still drive Hummers), animatronics dodgy enough to make Chucky look lifelike, and refugees from the Derek Zoolander School for Kids Who Can't Act Good. On the other hand, Debrah Farentino's ballsy female leader and a cast-against-type Clancy Brown make for highly unusual protagonists. In addition, a real attempt has been made to depict an alien landscape and its native underground inhabitants as something truly other, the use of nightmare imagery proving particularly compelling.

Even before its cancellation the show was giving ample signs of exhaustion, with several episodes rehashing old movie plots – the laziest being a *Terminator* clone in which a 25-year-old Uly, now a freedom fighter, travels back in time to get his mum's help.

**Discs:** The image transfer is generally above average given its vintage. This set gets additional brownie points for presenting the episodes in chronological order rather than as broadcast.

## The Execution of Private Slovik

Universal/NBC; US 1974; Transition Digital Media/Region 2 DVD; Certificate 12; 117 minutes; Aspect Ratio 4:3

**Programme:** Edward Donald Slovik was executed by firing squad on 31 January 1945 at Sainte-Marie-aux-Mines in France. He was one of approximately 40,000 American soldiers to have deserted during the Second World War but he remains the only case in the last 150 years where, of those found guilty of the



## Earth 2 Transplanting the taming of the American frontier to a sci-fi setting, it attempts to depict an alien landscape as something truly other

offence, the death sentence was carried out. Although we don't really find out why Slovik was singled out, what we get is a prismatic portrait of an eternal loser as seen through the eyes of his wife, lawyers, doctors and fellow soldiers, his sad fate never truly in doubt despite one's instincts for some kind of unlikely last-minute reprieve.

Compared with the similarly themed *Paths of Glory* (1957) and *King & Country* (1964), this wholly engrossing TV movie succeeds through tact, low-key intensity and the avoidance of overt emotion. In its cool detachment (there is no music score) it reaches a Bresson-like spirituality in a concluding half hour that relates the execution in exacting detail. In their autobiographical book *Stay Tuned*, writers/producers Richard Levinson and William Link recall dissuading Dustin Hoffman from taking the lead role, as Universal's executives bizarrely felt that his name had little value on television. Martin Sheen, however, is enormously charismatic as Slovik, keeping us rooting for a kind-hearted but ultimately luckless protagonist in a story with no readily identifiable heroes or villains.

**Disc:** This barebones release delivers a reasonably solid video and audio transfer.

## Justice – Series 1

Yorkshire TV/ITV; UK 1971-72; Network DVD/Region 2 DVD; 746 minutes; Certificate 12; Aspect Ratio 4:3; Features: 'Justice Is a Woman'

**Programme:** Modes of production and the syntax of the legal system proved

to be a particularly complementary combination for British television up to the 1980s. Until then, drama was largely produced in the studio and taped in long unbroken blocks effectively 'as live', using multiple cameras to create a style much closer to the theatre than film – an approach well suited to reflecting the intricate rituals and archaic traditions of courtroom procedure. Here Margaret Lockwood plays Harriet Peterson, a headstrong barrister trying to make it in a man's world through steely determination while resisting the cynicism of her head of chambers (a superbly eccentric performance by Philip Stone).

The cases are highly diverse, ranging from divorce, custody hearings, police bribery and even lowly speeding fines; the least convincing are a pair of jaundiced espionage stories by *Callan* creator James Mitchell (one even featuring Clifford Rose effectively reprising his role from that spy show), with Harriet haughtily concluding, "This can't happen in Britain... can it?" A murder case is left for the concluding episode but otherwise the approach is realistic enough for our protagonist's batting average for the season to close with four defeats, as many purely Pyrrhic victories and only a few outright wins.

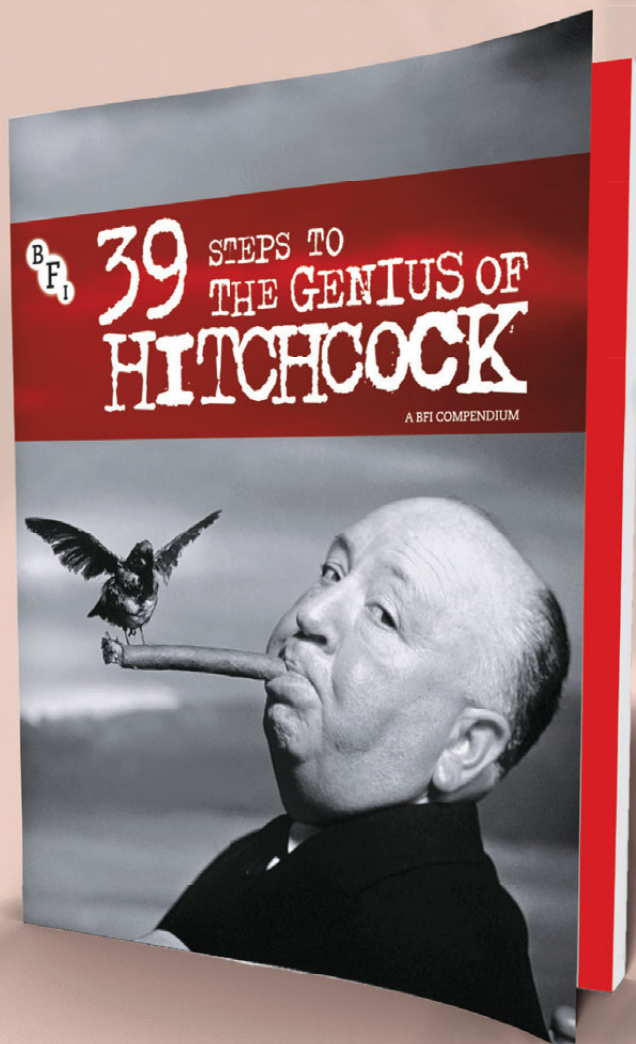
**Discs:** Video and film elements are in perfectly acceptable condition. The disc includes only one supplement – the one-off black-and-white drama *Justice Is a Woman* which served as a proof of concept for the eventual series – but it's a very welcome inclusion.





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# Frankly speaking

Nick Pinkerton savours a new study that aims to be the last word on Frank Tashlin

## Tashlinesque: The Hollywood Comedies of Frank Tashlin

By Ethan de Seife, Wesleyan University Press, 251pp, £31.50, ISBN 9780819572400

'Tashlinesque' is an attempt to categorise the comic narratives of one of mid-century America's more anarchic filmmakers by taking a scholarly scalpel to their component gags. Will academia spoil Frank Tashlin? Nothing could – and certainly not this close-read, steady and studious book on the science of silliness, which is funny only in as much as there's something intrinsically humorous about specimen-jarring such a wanton talent as Tashlin in terms of "(Fig. 1.7 a, b, c)" and "average shot length".

The premise might have tickled Tashlin, who started off as a cartoonist, drawing a daily for the Los Angeles Times, then directing animation at Columbia Pictures' Screen Gems and, most famously, Leon Schlesinger's cartoon unit at Warner Bros, where he was instrumental in shaping the star persona of Porky Pig. 'Tashlinesque', which soberly defines an adjective coined in a typically hopped-up Jean-Luc Godard review, examines Tashlin's work both during his cartooning career and, later, as director of live-action feature comedies, beginning with the 1952 Bob Hope vehicle 'Son of Paleface'.

Ethan de Seife is an assistant professor of film studies at New York's Hofstra University, and has evidently made screen comedy his speciality – his other authorial credit is a short book on 'This Is Spinal Tap'. 'Tashlinesque' is the first book-length study of Tashlin in English, to my knowledge, since Claire Johnston and Paul Willemen's 1973 anthology 'Frank Tashlin' – despite the fact that, as de Seife notes in the preface, a resurgence of interest in all things Tashlinesque has been underway.

"Tashlin has been generally misunderstood for decades," that preface further asserts, implying that all misunderstanding will end between the covers of this book. "A persistent argument about Frank Tashlin" – and this is de Seife's bête noire – "is that his cartoons anticipate his live-action features, and that his live-action features resemble cartoons." It certainly is persistent; indeed, it was repeated last month in this very publication by this very reviewer when discussing new DVDs of 'It's Only Money' and 'Who's Minding the Store?', two of the eight films Tashlin made with Jerry Lewis.

De Seife sets out to alter the terms of the conversation, arguing that the differences between animated and live-

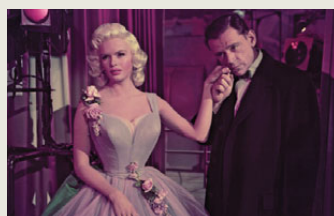


The art of comedy: Frank Tashlin started out as a cartoonist before directing live-action features

action comedy are not so vast as to make this 'compare and contrast' axiomatically revelatory. More important in considering Tashlin, who worked almost exclusively in comedy, is what cartoon and live-action comedy share: a common heritage in the American comic tradition of vaudeville and the Borscht Belt, where Tashlin's signatures – audience-address diegetic rupture, pop satire, bawdy humour – all originated. De Seife also draws out Tashlin's particular talent in tailoring material to the comic personas of his stars, including Porky, Hope, Lewis and Jayne Mansfield (personas interpreted in the book's most lucid passages).

Tashlin's own personality is fleetingly visible in 'Tashlinesque', in jousting memos between the ribald director and the censorious Production Code Administration offices, whose dictates

**His 1950s comedies with Jayne Mansfield are usually pointed to as the pinnacle of Tashlin's creative life**



'The Girl Can't Help It'

were skirted as often as not through Tashlin's conceding to requested cuts, then promptly ignoring the agreed-to concessions. Unfortunately, these skirmishes with the PCA offer practically the only clear images here of Tashlin the man. A better understanding of Tashlin's personal and professional context, beyond the stated fact of his peripatetic studio-hopping, might have gone some way towards explaining Tashlin's widely perceived decline – a perception de Seife does nothing to dispel – parallel to the decline of the PCA through the latter part of the 1960s.

In 1972 Tashlin died at the relatively young age of 59, his best years well past. His mid-1950s comedies with Mansfield, 'The Girl Can't Help It' and 'Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?', are usually pointed to as the pinnacle of his creative life – another piece of received wisdom that de Seife doesn't argue with. Their success, per de Seife's formulation, is due to their total synthesis of Tashlin's catalogued preoccupations, including "integration of gag and narration" – that is, comedy being put to the service of advancing plot or tied to character development.



'Will Success Spoil Rock Hunter?'

De Seife convincingly traces the dilution of Tashlin's art, in part, to his long collaboration with Lewis, who leaned towards standalone, un-integrated, "modular" comedy. (See for example Lewis's last directorial effort, 1983's 'Cracking Up', essentially a collection of blackout gags.)

In a penultimate chapter tellingly titled 'The Man in the Middle', de Seife attempts to definitively identify Tashlin through comparison, trying to pinpoint his location against a grid of self-assertive auteurs (household names Howard Hawks and Billy Wilder) and self-effacing "programmers" (Hal Walker, Normans Taurog and Z. McLeod), finally assigning Tashlin, somewhat tentatively, to the side of the programmers.

While it's refreshing to encounter a study devoted to a single director where the hero-worshipping author hasn't bent over backwards to justify even his subject's most execrable output with flashy revisionism, at times when reading 'Tashlinesque' it is as difficult to discern de Seife's enthusiasm for his subject as it is to discern the subject himself. Having rigorously defined the elements that make a film properly 'Tashlinesque', de Seife duly chastises those films that violate his formula – though, as one who has recently viewed Tashlin's dismissed 'Bachelor Flat' with a paying audience, I can attest that it still gets laughs. Given that they set out to amuse, Tashlin's films have not been "misunderstood" so much as insufficiently analysed – and it's hard to imagine the latter being done any more thoroughly than it is in these pages.



## FURTHER READING

### In Broad Daylight: Movies and Spectators After the Cinema

By Gabriele Pedullà, Verso, 182pp, £14.99, ISBN 9781844678532

"The cinema," said Kafka, "involves putting the eye into uniform, when before it was naked." Clothed in darkness, arrayed in rows, compelled to stare straight ahead: to join the ranks of viewers in a cinema is to be disciplined. It's this model of spectatorship that Gabriele Pedullà, professor of literature at the University of Teramo, examines in his concise, surprising essay. Pedullà explores the genealogy of the "dark cube" of cinematic projection whose "rigorous behavioural codes" gave rise to particular viewing styles – which, he states, have been in crisis since the 1970s with the advent of TV and the "individual media" of the digital era.

The historical timeline suggested by the book's subtitle is misleading; it should read 'before and after the cinema'. Pedullà argues that the movie theatre is the descendant of the theatrical auditoriums of the Italian Renaissance, when humanist enthusiasm for the Aristotelian dramas of the ancient world required the building of "a giant spectacle machine", following the ideas of the Roman architectural theorist Vitruvius, which would "construct the spectator". The movie theatre is thus seen as an evolutionary stage in over 500 years of "aesthetic technologies",



Seeried ranks: film-going discipline

including theatres and art galleries, which act to contextualise and condition the secular ritual of encountering art. However, Pedullà contends, the movie theatre is now a "twentieth century fetish" whose days are numbered.

This relatively *longue durée* approach allows Pedullà to dismiss film theory's standard models of the spectator – either as a prisoner still doing time in Plato's Cave or as Lacanian thumb-sucker facing the Mirror of the screen – but his repeated emphasis on the movie theatre's disciplinary function made me fear he was simply reasserting them from a different angle. Then an unexpected line of argument emerges. The filmic narratives of D.W. Griffith, longer and more complex than the short 'attractions' of early cinema, would not

have found their proper audience without the silent attentiveness demanded by the "steely modernist device" of the movie theatre. So film meets viewer in the ideal setting and what Pedullà ironically calls "the age of freedom" ensues: a roughly 50-year period, from the end of the silent era to the close of the 1970s, during which time "classical cinema was inseparable from the invention of the classical spectator".

This "brief encounter" is the hinge on which the book turns, roughly half of it setting out the conditions by which such classicism was attained, the remainder dealing with the post-cinematic aftermath. And while it's an erudite rumination, it often reads more like a dialogue with and against key theorists of the moving image than with films themselves. Though there is an attempt to list the formal features of what Pedullà neatly dubs those "amphibious works" made to function on big and small screens alike (eg increased rapidity of cutting, the camera's extreme mobility etc), the absence of any sustained attention to specific films makes the tone inescapably more speculative than analytical.

What's really surprising, though, is where Pedullà goes in his reading of the post-cinematic era. Readers expecting a

detailed engagement with what he calls "individual media" – iPhones and their iterations, "like a heresy that has conquered more faithful than the original religion" – will be disappointed. The principal post-cinematic technology here remains television, especially the 'zapping' enabled by remote control. But it's the capacities that television and other individual media make us remote from, even in our supposed ability to control their images, that concern him: the ability to identify with characters, to feel emotional empathy, to exercise imagination as a prerequisite of moral sense. Suddenly, it's as if Walter Benjamin had torn away the mask to reveal himself as George Steiner!

But this rather disconcerting volte-face is worked up to via a careful engagement with Stanley Cavell on tragedy and Serge Daney on the question of the ethical position available to the post-cinematic viewer. And because it's hard to predict the nature of technological change, I suppose it makes a kind of sense to engage with an older set of values – residing in a humanist vision of the purpose of narrative – to see what's become of them. And in this regard, Pedullà has little doubt: the eye is now liberated to scan competing sources of "low impact catharsis". ♦ Chris Darke

### Joss Whedon: The Complete Companion

Edited by Mary Alice Money, Titan Books, 496pp, £14.99, ISBN 9780857689863

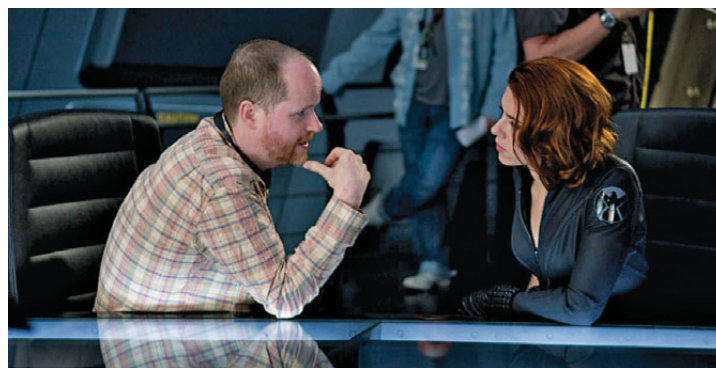
As the unwieldy sub-subtitle of this book – "The TV Series, the Movies, the Comic Books and More" – indicates, Joss Whedon is the first transmedia auteur, working across multiple media platforms horizontally, but – with *Avengers Assemble* – pulling off the difficult feat of bringing the maverick traits for which he's widely acclaimed into a studio system not notably tolerant of mavericks. Whedon's code-switching mobility is key to his current success: he moved from TV comedy (including a stint on *Roseanne*) to screenwriting (*Buffy the Vampire Slayer*, *Alien: Resurrection*) and script doctoring, before reclaiming the *Buffy* property for TV – which in turn became a springboard for a spin-off show (*Angel*).

Two further high-concept genre TV shows followed – and were swiftly cancelled: *Firefly* (2002-03), a space western whose fan campaign earned Whedon his first feature-directing job with the 2005 spin-off *Serenity*; and *Dollhouse* (2009-10), a post-human programmable-people fantasy (Ian Mathers and Erin Casey make a strong case here for it being better than that elevator pitch suggests). Despite bumpy rides on TV, all four of his shows have generated comics series, with Whedon himself taking the helm on the comic-book version of *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*

*Season Eight*, among others. This cross-platform shift secured both studio and fan confidence in Whedon's first blockbuster film as writer-director, the Marvel comic-based *Avengers Assemble*, which is already the third highest-grossing film of all time.

In the closing essay, Matthew Hurd offers 'Six Reasons Why Joss Whedon is the Perfect Director for *The Avengers*' (US title) – reasons expanded upon in other essays: his comics work (see Kevin Chiat's considered 'Giant Dawn and Mutant Superheroes'); his humanism (Candace West on Whedon's unheroic heroes); his collaborativeness (an interview with writer/producer Tim Minear; Lynette Porter's excellent star study of *Firefly*/*Serenity*'s Nathan Fillion); his respect for his audience (Lily Rothman and Lisa Anderson on uniquely activist fan cultures); and his style. This is best described in Rhonda Wilcox's stand-out close reading of the *Buffy* episode 'Passion', the first time Whedon killed off a major character – something that's become one of his much-discussed signature traits.

Like his characters, Whedon's best-loved projects are vulnerable to unpredictable and much-mourned early demise after struggles for creative autonomy. As Ian Chant notes, "*Firefly* was the Underdog... And people have an underdog's love for it." This critical companion from Titan Books, based on a pre-*Avengers Assemble* 'Spotlight'



A marvel: Joss Whedon with Scarlett Johansson on the set of 'Avengers Assemble'

feature in US webzine *PopMatters*, marks a potential transition from Whedon's heroic underdog status to Hollywood divinity – yet theologian Ronald Helfrich's argument that Whedon's creative control should instigate a return to exegetical auteur studies entirely misses the point. Not only – as the book argues – does Whedon's insistently collaborative and transmedia model of auteurship insist that the terms of authorship be redefined, but the Whedon creed is explicitly humanist in its resistance to the single truth asserted by the powers that be (including himself as author). Gods are never good in the WhedonVerse except in so far as they access their humanity – as two essays on Illyria, the

god who killed and then possessed *Angel* fan-favourite Fred, demonstrate.

At their best, as in Bronwen Calvert's take on Illyria or Leanne McRae's postcolonial reading of *Serenity*, these essays are Whedonesque, offering a wide range of readers access to an equally wide-ranging conversation that mirrors Whedon's work in its ability to acknowledge the political complexity of pop-cultural production without losing sight of narrative attractions. The pleasure of this conversation – and its resistance to the blockbusting norm – has become definitional for a TV-viewing generation, and this collection is at its best when documenting, explaining and embodying this W/hedonism. ♦ Sophie Mayer



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## Keys to the 'Kingdom'

In *Moonrise Kingdom* (cover feature, S&S, June) Wes Anderson's uniformed campers are 'Khaki Scouts (North America)', which suggests he is the latest victim of the jealous guardianship with which the Boy Scouts of America inexplicably prevent filmmakers mentioning their cherished 'brand'. In the Pixar animation *Up* (2009) the resourceful stowaway in a badge-bedecked uniform is a 'Wilderness Explorer'; in the thriller *Arlington Road* (1999) the sons of Jeff Bridges and Tim Robbins are khaki-shorted 'Young Discoverers'; and in the Spielberg-produced UFO miniseries *Taken* (2002), the boys practising tracking skills who stumble across the Roswell crash site are 'Pioneer Rangers'.

As far back as 1949, long before today's obsession with 'brand management', in *The Great Lover* Bob Hope is in nominal charge of 'Boy Foresters'; and ten years earlier still, in Capra's *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*, James Stewart's character leads a troop of 'Boy Rangers' before entering politics. Why is the US movement so reluctant to be named on film? Here in the birthplace of the Scouts, by contrast, Baden-Powell's successors didn't even object when Ken Russell's *The Lair of the White Worm* (1988) showed the Lamia's youngest victim in a familiar uniform, while in *Brandy for the Parson* (1952) a whole gang of cubs and scouts are shown smuggling barrels of the titular fluid.

**Michael Bennett**  
London

The review by Sam Davies of *Moonrise Kingdom* (S&S, July) is fair enough, but he is surely neglecting his duties as a critic by making no mention at all of the use of music in the film. The extensive use of works by Benjamin Britten and original music by Alexander Desplat is nowhere acknowledged, and Britten isn't even listed in your abbreviated credits.

**Scouts:**  
**'Moonrise Kingdom'**



## LETTER OF THE MONTH



### Regarding Reygadas

One can only applaud the single-minded desire of Carlos Reygadas to challenge and confound audiences, but it is interesting that many commentators increasingly describe him as a maverick. Having emerged fully formed as a filmmaker with his debut feature, he has shown skill and adaptability in channelling the giants of cinema – Tarkovsky in *Japón* (2002),

Bresson in *Battle in Heaven* (2005) and (take your pick) Dreyer, Bergman and perhaps even Ozu in *Silent Light* (2007).

While imitation is the greatest form of flattery, one might have hoped that the 'autobiographical' *Post Tenebras Lux* (above) would be a diversion on a more personal, original tangent. But despite the general confusion upon first viewing ('Cannes 2012', S&S, July), Reygadas appears to have revisited the

admitted source of his cinematic awakening and inspiration – Tarkovsky. *Post Tenebras Lux* is surely his own *Mirror*. Far from a maverick, Reygadas shows a commitment to classical methods and the transcendental style of his influences. What remains to be seen is the development of his own authorial voice and style.

**Mike Ashcroft**  
Kendal, Cumbria

Do your critics stay until the end of the credits? In this particular instance, a young person's voice introduces Desplat's themes in the movie and gives another lesson in music construction, just as the first scene of the kid's house uses Britten's 'The Young Person's Guide to the Orchestra', to similar great effect.

At the very end of the credits a child's voice announced to an empty auditorium (except for me): "Thank you for listening."

**Michael Hudson**  
Sheffield

### Caption blues

I expect that many will have noticed that the figure on the right-hand side of the photograph from *Too Late Blues* (DVDs, S&S, July) is John Cassavetes and not Bobby Darin, while the figure on the left is Darin and not Everett Chambers!

**Grahame Smith**  
Gargunmock, Stirling

### The uses of cinema

Mar Diestro-Dópido saw many fine things in *A Useful Life* (Reviews, S&S, February) that I would have missed, but it contains a wealth of other delights. Courtesy of DVD image magnification, it is possible to see that the keys to the cinema storage rooms are in the empty box of Kurosawa's *Ikiru* (*Vivir* in Spanish),

in which a man only finds a 'useful life' when he learns of his terminal illness.

However, unlike Kurosawa's formerly moribund paper pusher, Jorge in *A Useful Life* has long been fighting to keep something precious. When his old life of middle-manager drudgery collapses with the closure of the Cinematheque, he – and we – start to see the world in terms of movies, and that is his salvation. This begins after his bereft weeping on the bus prompts a searching gaze from someone who might be his younger self, and the bus deposits him stranded at the side of the road. The soundtrack song laments the death of the horses ridden earlier in a lost happy life – surely a reference to the horse images in the Cinematheque foyer, those relatives of Muybridge's 1878 horse that were the prototype not just for the mechanics of cinema but for the liberation from the mundane that the cinema can deliver. Before long, though, the trumpets of John Ford's cavalry are rallying Jorge to a charge. He then finds his own voice in a soliloquy on lies to a law class that has mistaken him for a substitute teacher.

The joy of *A Useful Life* – for those of us who love cinema – is that it says we are not just sitting in the dingy gloom prior to some tedious intellectualising like that of the Cinematheque director, whose goal is to explain away why someone might

be moved. The movies have changed us too, making us better and stronger. And even if the houses where we learned to love them are threatened, we are still riding Muybridge's horse to richer and happier lives, in which we can meet the basilisk gaze of our own younger selves.

**Dan Smith**  
By email

### 'Odd Man' out

Could I supply a correction to the review of *Mr Rose* (DVDs, S&S, July)? *It's Dark Outside* was a spin-off from *The Odd Man*, not vice versa. The character of Chief Inspector Rose (played by William Mervyn) first appeared in the latter, replacing Chief Inspector Gordon (Moultrie Kelsall), who left the series. *The Odd Man* was also notable for major roles for Keith Barron and Anna Cropper. I watched all three series assiduously, and would very much like to own them. DVD companies please take note.

**David Morton**  
Driffild, East Yorkshire

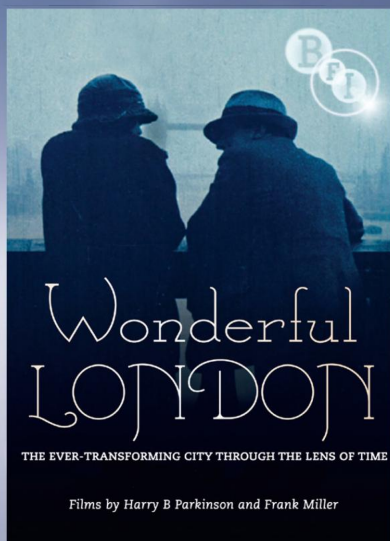
### Additions & corrections

**July** p.55 *Dark Horse*, Cert 15, 85m 53s, 7,729 ft +8 frames; p.57 *The Dictator*, writing credit Jeff Scaffer should read Jeff Schaffer; p.66 *Late September*, Cert 15, 87m 30s, 7,875 ft +0 frames; p.70 *On the Sly*, Cert U, 76m 35s, 6,892 ft +8 frames; p.82 *Your Sister's Sister*, aspect ratio is 1.85:1.

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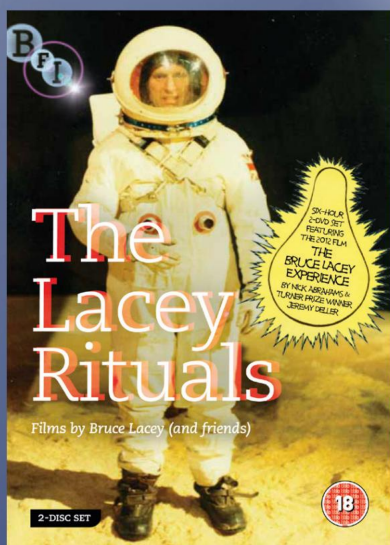
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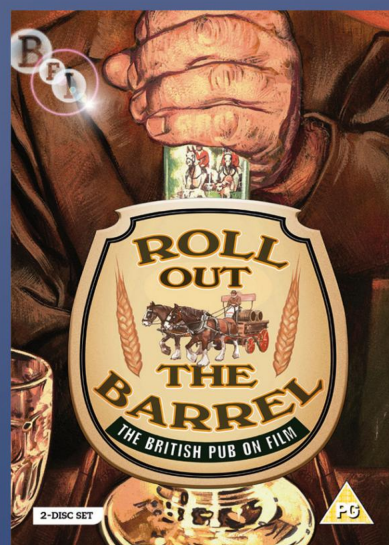
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